



Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS

THURSDAY — 9 DEC 2021



	International	National	Regional and Local
Events, Opportunities Go to articles	12/09 Denmark new virus restrictions 12/09 Group: China committed genocide 12/09 US orders arms embargo Cambodia 12/09 New Zealand: China growing challenge 12/09 China property firms default \$1.6B bonds 12/09 Hong Kong convicts democracy activists 12/09 Remote learning as well as classroom? No 12/09 Northern Cameroon violence: 22 killed 12/08 South Africa virus cases rise in children 12/08 Report: world unprepared next pandemic 12/08 Data: 3 Pfizer doses protect from omicron 12/08 Britain introduces tougher Covid measures 12/08 Omicron cases double in UK every 2-3 days 12/08 UK: 'effectively' diplomatic boycott 12/08 NATO's long dilemma over Ukraine 12/08 Russia military movements near Ukraine 12/08 US economic threat to Russia: limited tool? 12/08 Beijing reigns in China's central bank 12/08 New Zealand bans young from smoking 12/08 India military chief dies in helicopter crash 12/08 Myanmar troops burn alive 11 in retaliation 12/07 'Cautious' China shifts Africa approach	12/09 Delta overwhelms: hospitals struggle 12/09 Traveling? Covid tests costs widely vary 12/09 CDC travel warnings hit Europe hot spots 12/09 Inflation near 40yr-high 12/08 L.A. school district fires hundreds 12/08 Covid-era travel risks are changing 12/08 Omicron pushes remote work interest 12/08 Experts: CDC vaccination rates inflated 12/08 New Covid-19 antibody drug authorized 12/08 Scientists: coronavirus attacks fat tissue 12/08 Cases spike amid 200M vaccine milestone 12/08 Hospitalizations: 6 states half of US cases 12/08 States deploy National Guard in pandemic 12/08 Covid deaths rise: prolonged grief disorder 12/08 Competition: US, China in Africa 12/08 US-led diplomatic boycott snowballs 12/08 He said, he said: readout disconnect 12/08 Job openings jumped in October 12/08 Industries workers quit the most 12/08 Supply chain problems hit beverages 12/08 Tech helping poor people get govt. aid 12/08 Child tax credit payments set to expire 12/08 Drug firm \$200M settlement NY opioid trial 12/08 Federal govt. to be carbon neutral by 2050 12/08 Hawaii drying out after historic Dec. deluge 12/08 New CBP commissioner confirmed 12/08 'Remain in Mexico' program resumes 12/08 Extreme Calif. drought forces changes 12/08 Pentagon: China preparing Taiwan attack	12/08 DOH: 787,245 cases, 9497 deaths 12/08 King Co. woman w/omicron: 'mild illness' 12/08 Some school jobs harder to fill than others 12/08 Gap narrows in Sawant recall vote 12/08 Cop rolled bike over protester suspended 12/08 Mayor's email on CHOP shooting surfaces 12/08 Olympia clears homeless encampment
Cyber Awareness Go to articles	12/08 Tor's main site blocked in Russia 12/08 Emotet piggybacking on TrickBot 12/08 Australia CS Energy foils cyberattack 12/08 Report: Chinese hackers target SE Asia 12/08 XE Group exposed: 8yrs of hacking, theft 12/08 Report: passports most attacked form of ID	12/08 Supply chain threats still loom 12/08 Deep fakes widen fraud opportunities 12/08 'Burnout' becomes security nightmare 12/08 Software vulnerabilities up 20% in 2021 12/08 Credit card swipers infect WordPress sites 12/08 What caused Amazon Web Service outage? 12/08 AWS outage disrupted businesses, homes 12/08 Identity fraud: major growth area for crooks 12/08 Financial fraudsters new ways scam elderly	
Terror Conditions Go to articles	12/09 Displaced Nigerians fear return home 12/08 Kenya man sets off explosives, kills 2 12/08 UN peacekeepers killed in central Mali 12/08 Covid change violent extremist landscape?	12/09 Iraq, US-led coalition conclude talks 12/09 Would-be terrorist trained for jihad Texas? 12/08 Conviction mass surveillance case upheld 12/08 'Alt-jihad' rising on social media	
Suspicious, Unusual Go to articles	12/09 Jailed journalists reach record high	12/08 Lead poisoning crisis impacting children 12/08 'It's a different beast': fentanyl deaths rise 12/08 Climate change: hurricanes sooner, longer	12/08 Quake swarm rattles off Oregon coast 12/08 UW seismologists concern on ShakeAlert
Crime, Criminals Go to articles	12/09 Denmark: arrests; leaking classified info 12/08 Cartels hiring kids to be hitmen 12/08 US: El Salvador secret deal w/violent gangs	12/08 Students copycat threats to attack schools 12/08 Homicide records broken in 12 major cities 12/08 Columbus OH: triple shooting; 2 kids dead 12/08 Michigan man charged: assault, Capitol riot 12/08 Father, son arrested in Calif. Caldor wildfire 12/08 Scott Peterson resented to life in prison	12/08 Where is Oakley Carlson? 12/08 Pierce Co. faces rise vehicle thefts 12/08 Everett police arrest prolific burglar 12/08 Federal Way police: man shot, killed 12/08 WSP: copper thefts King Co. freeways 12/08 Tukwila: teen, toddler injured in shooting 12/07 DOC: Covid outbreak Monroe facility

[DISCLAIMER and FAIR USE Notice](#)

Events, Opportunities

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	12/09 Delta overwhelms: hospitals struggle
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/12/09/world/omicron-variant-covid#as-the-delta-variant-fuels-hospitalizations-in-the-us-health-care-systems-struggle
GIST	<p>Health officials may be bracing for the Omicron variant to sweep through the country, but the Delta variant remains the more imminent threat as it continues to drive an increase in hospitalizations.</p> <p>Health care workers said their situations had been worsened by staff shortages brought on by burnout, illnesses and resistance to vaccine mandates.</p> <p>More than 55,000 coronavirus patients are hospitalized nationwide, far fewer than in September, but an increase of more than 15 percent over the past two weeks, according to a New York Times analysis. The United States is averaging about 121,300 coronavirus cases a day, an increase of about 27 percent from two weeks ago, and reported deaths are up 12 percent, to an average of about 1,275 per day.</p> <p>Michigan, which leads the country in hospitalizations per capita, announced last month that the federal government was sending health care workers to support some hospitals. On Wednesday, Vermont had a record of about 90 people hospitalized with Covid-19, according the state's health department. And cases and hospitalizations are rising fastest in Connecticut, which recorded a 69 percent increase in patients in the past two weeks.</p> <p>Even states that rank among the highest in vaccination rates are struggling, like Maine, where about 73 percent of the population is fully vaccinated, behind only Vermont and Rhode Island, according to a New York Times database. Cases in Maine recently reached their pandemic peak.</p> <p>On Wednesday, with Maine's hospitals straining, Gov. Janet Mills activated as many as 75 members of the state's National Guard to help. The Guard members, she said, would support nursing facilities and administer monoclonal antibodies, which help prevent serious illness.</p> <p>"I do not take this action lightly," Ms. Mills said in a statement. "But we must take steps to alleviate the strain on our health care system and ensure care for all those who need it."</p> <p>Maine Medical Center, the state's largest hospital, said in a statement on Wednesday that there had been times this week "when there were no critical care beds available," forcing hospital leaders to postpone surgeries.</p> <p>"We are caring for an unprecedented number of patients," the hospital said.</p> <p>In Missouri, officials are reporting burnout among health care workers.</p> <p>Dr. Raghu Adiga, the chief medical officer at Liberty Hospital in Liberty, Mo., said on Wednesday that his staff was frustrated with those who were unvaccinated because they were driving this latest surge.</p> <p>"They're going to have to help us help them," Dr. Adiga said.</p> <p>More than 1,600 people in Missouri were hospitalized with Covid-19 as of Wednesday, compared with about 980 on Nov. 8, data shows.</p> <p>Missouri's University Health hospital system had 10 people hospitalized with Covid in early November, said Dr. Mark Steele, the system's chief medical officer. On Wednesday, there were 39.</p> <p>"What we're seeing now is still overwhelmingly the Delta variant," Dr. Steele said, adding that now, there are "concerns about Omicron" to think about.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	12/09 Inflation near 40yr-high
----------	--------------------------------

SOURCE	https://finance.yahoo.com/news/inflation-near-40-high-shocks-120000359.html
GIST	<p>(Bloomberg) -- The U.S. is poised to enter Year Three of the pandemic with both a booming economy and a still-mutating virus. But for Washington and Wall Street, one Covid aftershock is starting to eclipse almost everything else.</p> <p>Already-hot inflation is forecast to climb even further when November data comes out on Friday, to 6.8%. That would be the highest rate since Ronald Reagan was president in the early 1980s -- and in the lifetimes of most Americans.</p> <p>Higher prices helped deliver a banner year for U.S. business, which is posting its fattest profit margins since the 1950s. But for Joe Biden's administration and the Federal Reserve -- who didn't see it coming -- the sudden return of inflation, largely dormant for decades before 2021, is looking increasingly traumatic.</p> <p>It's likely to drive some big changes in the coming year, as the Fed pivots toward raising interest rates and the president heads into midterm elections with slumping approval ratings.</p> <p>How did it happen? Essentially, the pandemic made it harder for the world to produce stuff and move it around. The government shored up incomes in the crisis like never before, so households remained eager to spend. And a combination of lockdowns and Covid caution meant their purchasing power was focused on consumer goods instead of services.</p> <p>That's why there are long lines of cargo ships stretching off the coast of Los Angeles waiting to dock, while used-car dealers keep hiking prices and a global commodities rally leaves Americans paying more at grocery stores and gas pumps.</p> <p>Hotspots to Everywhere</p> <p>A year ago, economists were forecasting 2% inflation for 2021. The pandemic had depressed prices early on, and everyone expected a rebound. But Fed Chair Jerome Powell's prediction that it would be temporary, and not very large, was widely shared.</p> <p>The first hint that inflation was about to really accelerate came in February, said Omair Sharif, president of research company Inflation Insights LLC. "Something was bubbling under the surface -- and more specifically in autos."</p> <p>A pandemic-driven shortage of semiconductors was holding back production of new cars, so buyers -- including rental firms, who'd sold off their fleets earlier in the crisis -- were bidding up the prices of old ones.</p> <p>Americans had the cash. In contrast to the last recession, when fiscal austerity held back the recovery, Congress kept the stimulus flowing. On top of the \$2.2 trillion rescue package in the spring of 2020, when the pandemic arrived, came another \$900 billion in December 2020, then \$1.9 trillion more in March after Biden took office.</p> <p>But consumers remained reluctant to spend money in gyms or restaurants, say, where they might catch Covid-19 -- so they bought more goods instead. Shortages of materials, and workers, were creating bottlenecks all along the supply chain. Ports got jammed. Imports kept breaking records.</p> <p>"It was a demand shock," says Aneta Markowska, chief financial economist at Jefferies. "It's the U.S. consumer essentially that caused this inflationary impulse, by just buying more stuff than the global economy can produce."</p> <p>Commodity Stories</p> <p>With other countries recovering too, albeit less exuberantly, globalized commodities like oil were rebounding. U.S. pump prices are about 50% higher than a year ago.</p>

The commodity surge wasn't limited to energy. One of the pandemic inflation's headline-grabbing episodes came in lumber markets, where prices jumped about 70% from early March to early May — adding steam to an incipient housing boom.

When the lumber bubble burst, some -- including Powell -- cited it as an example of how pandemic inflation could soon fade. But global food prices, after a lull in June and July, started climbing again. Helped by some bad weather around the planet, they were up 27% in the 12 months through November, reflecting jumps in everything from meat and wheat to coffee and cooking oil.

Grocery chain Kroger Co. "saw higher product cost inflation in most categories" in the third quarter, Chief Financial Officer Gary Millerchip said on a Dec. 2 earnings call. "We are passing along higher cost to the customer where it makes sense to do so."

For American business, those higher costs included wage bills. Employers were struggling to increase headcount fast enough to meet soaring demand. In June, Chipotle Mexican Grill Inc. made headlines by hiking prices some 4% to offset pay raises. Plenty more companies would join them as the year went on.

At least in the eyes of the market, September's CPI report was the turning point, when inflation spread well beyond a handful of hotspots. The overall rise in the index was muted — but food and shelter contributed more than half of it, with rents jumping the most in two decades.

Biden Feels Heat

Biden's plan had been to follow up Covid stimulus with multi-trillion-dollar investments in child-care and clean energy. Centrist Democrats in Congress, though, were already pointing to government spending as a driver of rising inflation -- and balking at voting for more of it. The programs were scaled back. More cuts may follow in the Senate this month.

The president's approval ratings were on the slide, with polls suggesting voters don't like his handling of the economy and are inclined to blame him for inflation. That spells trouble for his party, which must defend thin majorities in mid-term elections next November.

Biden set up a supply-chain task force to ease logjams, released petroleum reserves, and called out gasoline companies for pocketing too much profit. He's under pressure to do more -- but presidents have limited powers to counter price increases.

Powell Caves

Throughout 2021 the White House, when pressed on inflation, has deferred to the Fed -- citing experts there who said it would be transitory. But in recent months, as prices surged, Fed officials faced growing resistance to that stance, and began backing away from it.

On Nov. 30, just over a week after he was tapped by Biden to serve a second term, Powell finally caved. "I think the word 'transitory' has different meanings to different people," he said. "It's probably a good time to retire that word."

A few minutes later, he made big news: Fed officials, at their next policy meeting on Dec. 14-15, would consider accelerating the withdrawal of monetary stimulus -- potentially ending their bond purchases as early as March, and opening the door to interest-rate increases by the middle of next year.

Powell's pivot came as a surprise, with market volatility surging after the arrival of the Omicron variant. Fed officials tend to downplay the idea that any one month's worth of data -- which is all they had since taper plans were laid out in early November -- is enough to force a change in monetary policy.

Kitchen Tables

By that point, the great inflation debate had broken out of policy circles. It was now conducted around kitchen tables, too.

Economists tend to look at so-called “core inflation,” which strips out more volatile food and energy prices. For American workers, paying a dollar more per gallon at the gas pump, or 20% more for beef, is a more tangible measure.

In November, one in four respondents to a University of Michigan survey said inflation had lowered their living standards, double the level of six months earlier. The unaccustomed jump in living costs put the spotlight on incomes, and whether they’re keeping up.

With bosses desperate to fill an unprecedented number of vacant jobs, workers are enjoying rare bargaining power. Some 10,000 workers at Deere & Co. went on strike for the first time since 1986, winning a 10% raise plus better retirement benefits.

Across the economy, compensation rose at the fastest pace on record in the third quarter. Those at the bottom of the pay scale have benefited most -- although even there, wage hikes mostly are below the current rate of inflation.

What’s Next?

While Bloomberg Economics predicts inflation close to 7% for another few months, there’s widespread agreement that it will come down at some point next year.

Energy markets are already signaling some relief, with oil down about 15% since late October, presaging lower fuel and transportation costs in 2022. Durable goods inflation is projected to slow as the pandemic recedes and households return to more-normal spending patterns.

One offset to that may be housing costs. Bloomberg Economics’ David Wilcox says they could be rising at a 6% to 7% pace by next summer, about double the rate in the years before the pandemic.

Maybe the biggest unknown in 2022 is wages, already rising faster than at any point in the decade-long expansion that ended with the arrival of Covid-19.

“The question for me isn’t whether inflation will slow,” said Markowska at Jefferies. “The question is, are we going back to 2? Are we going back to 3? What’s the medium-term destination? And that’s, I think, going to be determined by the labor market.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	12/08 Olympia clears homeless encampment
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/city-olympia-clears-encampment-deschutes-parkway/3MAGWTU4I5SDSGIZWVCNDZLX4M/
GIST	<p>OLYMPIA, Wash. — The city of Olympia began clearing a homeless encampment along the Deschutes Parkway on Wednesday.</p> <p>According to a release from the city, the decision was made to clear the camp for the health and safety of residents.</p> <p>The owners of the property requested that the city enforce trespass laws and remove the camp as the state’s eviction moratorium had ended after Oct. 31.</p> <p>The clearing also comes after three violent incidents at the encampment in October.</p>

	<p>City officials stated that during the week of Nov. 15, people living at the camp were given a written notice, which was posted at the site on Dec. 3.</p> <p>On Dec. 8, the city began removing all debris, trash and garbage and said people living at the encampment needed to leave by 8 a.m., according to the release.</p> <p>As for the clean-up, officials said Deschutes Parkway will be closed from Lakeridge Drive to 5th Avenue.</p> <p>It is not clear where the campers will go because the city's sanctioned camping site is mostly full.</p> <p>The city said in part, "The City does not have the resources to provide alternative shelter options for all the individuals from the encampment, and unfortunately, there are not enough shelter beds available in our community. However, City staff are working on-site with the individuals to find alternative places for them to live."</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	12/09 Northern Cameroon violence; 22 killed
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/violence-between-farmers-herders-kills-least-22-northern-cameroon-2021-12-09/
GIST	<p>DOUALA, Dec 9 (Reuters) - A resurgence of tit-for-tat violence between herders and farmers in has killed at least 22 people and injured more than 30 others this week in Cameroon's Far North region, a regional government official said on Thursday, prompting residents to flee to Chad.</p> <p>"We are in a full-on inter-community conflict," said the Cameroonian regional official, who asked not to be named.</p> <p>Hundreds of people fleeing the violence between Arab Choa herders and Mousgoum and Massa farmers have streamed across the border into neighbouring Chad, the mayor of Chad's capital N'Djamena, Ali Haroun, told Reuters.</p> <p>A traditional leader in northern Cameroon, who also asked not to be named, told Reuters the violence began over access to water.</p> <p>"The Arab Choa wanted to take their herds to the banks of a river. The Mousgoum and Massa prevented them," the leader said.</p> <p>The United Nations refugee agency, which is responding to the crisis, said in a report in November that reduced rainfall in the area has dried up rivers and seasonal ponds that communities depend on, leading to clashes.</p> <p>Similar violence in August between Choa herders and Mousgoum fishermen killed dozens of people and forced thousands to flee to Chad.</p> <p>"This problem needs to be resolved quickly because a few months ago, there were already deaths. Today, when there is a problem between two people from different communities, all the communities get involved with weapons," the leader said.</p> <p>Chad's President Mahamat Idris Deby said on Twitter late on Wednesday that over 30,000 Cameroonians had sought refuge in Chad, but did not specify if they were all from the latest wave of violence.</p> <p>He urged the international community to provide prompt aid to help Chad deal with the situation.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	12/09 Denmark new virus restrictions
----------	---

SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-business-lifestyle-health-europe-5b21f2395e6ac9a910fb94cce1f1321d
GIST	<p>COPENHAGEN, Denmark (AP) — Denmark’s government has decided that school students up to the 10th grade must study remotely for the last few days before Christmas break and ordered nightclubs, bars and restaurants to close at midnight as part of efforts to counter an uptick in COVID-19 cases.</p> <p>Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen also banned concerts where audiences have more than 50 people standing and required restaurant patrons to wear face masks when they are not seated. He further recommended Wednesday that people work from home,</p> <p>The measures apply as of Friday and are set to last for four weeks. The virtual teaching starts Wednesday, Dec. 15. In Denmark, schools go on Christmas break as Dec. 20.</p> <p>Speaking of the omicron variant, Frederiksen said that it is “expected that this will mean more infected, more sick and thus potentially more hospitalized patients.”</p> <p>“Thus, the new variant also entails a significant risk of critically overloading the health service, and that is why we now have to do more,” Frederiksen said.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	12/09 Group: China committed genocide
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/europe-religion-china-genocides-xi-jinping-9f20b0f7a77b1071ad32c81241678f3b
GIST	<p>LONDON (AP) — An independent and unofficial body set up by a prominent British barrister to assess evidence on China’s alleged rights abuses against the Uyghur people concluded Thursday that the Chinese government committed genocide and crimes against humanity.</p> <p>The Uyghur Tribunal, made up of lawyers, academics and businesspeople, doesn’t have any government backing or powers to sanction or punish China. But organizers hope the process of publicly laying out evidence will compel international action to tackle alleged abuses against the Uyghurs, a largely Muslim ethnic group.</p> <p>Tribunal chair Geoffrey Nice said the group was satisfied that forced birth control and sterilization policies targeting Uyghurs in China’s far western Xinjiang province were intended to reduce the group’s population. The abuse was part of comprehensive policies directly linked to President Xi Jinping and the highest levels of the Chinese government, he said.</p> <p>The Chinese Embassy in London didn’t immediately respond to requests for comment. In Beijing, Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said Thursday that “the so-called forced labor and genocide in Xinjiang are entirely vicious rumors.”</p> <p>Wang was responding to a question about a law passed Wednesday by the U.S. House of Representatives to ban imports from Xinjiang over forced labor concerns. Wang accused the U.S. of using Xinjiang-related issues to “spread rumors under the guise of human rights and engage in political manipulation and economic bullying.”</p> <p>The Uyghur Tribunal concluded that it was beyond doubt that crimes against humanity were committed, including the torture and rape of scores held in vast detention centers.</p> <p>“On the basis of evidence heard in public, the tribunal is satisfied beyond reasonable doubt that the People’s Republic of China, by the imposition of measures to prevent births intended to destroy a significant part of the Uyghurs in Xinjiang as such, has committed genocide,” said Nice, a senior lawyer who led the prosecution of ex-Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic and has worked with the International Criminal Court.</p> <p>He said Xi and other senior officials “bear primary responsibility” for what has occurred in Xinjiang.</p>

	<p>“This vast apparatus of state repression could not exist if a plan was not authorized at the highest levels,” Nice said.</p> <p>An estimated 1 million people or more — most of them Uyghurs — have been confined in reeducation camps in Xinjiang in recent years, according to researchers.</p> <p>The hearings were the latest attempt to hold China accountable for alleged rights abuses against the Uyghurs and other predominantly Muslim and ethnic Turkic minorities.</p> <p>Around 30 witnesses and experts gave evidence to a series of public hearings in central London earlier this year, alleging torture, rape and beatings by authorities while in state detention centers in Xinjiang province.</p> <p>The hearings also reviewed evidence, including leaked Chinese government documents, detailing other policies including systematic forced birth control, the separation of young children from their families, forced labor and the destruction of mosques.</p> <p>The U.S. government has declared that Beijing’s policies against the Uyghurs amounted to genocide and crimes against humanity. Legislatures in Britain, Belgium, the Netherlands and Canada have done the same.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	12/09 US orders arms embargo Cambodia
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/business-asia-southeast-asia-foreign-policy-george-w-bush-dcace984dcd5a50bf4e3acde33afde5a
GIST	<p>BANGKOK (AP) — The U.S. has ordered an arms embargo on Cambodia, citing deepening Chinese military influence, corruption and human rights abuses by the government and armed forces in the Southeast Asian country.</p> <p>The added restrictions on defense-related goods and services, issued by the State and Commerce departments, are due to be published and take effect Thursday.</p> <p>A notice in the Federal Register said developments in Cambodia were “contrary to U.S. national security and foreign policy interests.”</p> <p>The aim of the embargo is to ensure that defense-related items are not available to Cambodia’s military and military intelligence services without advance review by the U.S. government, it said.</p> <p>The latest restrictions follow the Treasury Department’s ordering in November of sanctions against two senior Cambodian military officials for corruption and come amid increasing concern about Beijing’s sway.</p> <p>At the time, the U.S. government issued an advisory cautioning American businesses about potential exposure to entities Cambodia and its military that “engage in human rights abuses, corruption and other destabilizing conduct.”</p> <p>Cambodia branded those sanctions as “politically motivated” and said it would not discuss them with Washington.</p> <p>The U.S. has similar controls on exports of items that might be diverted to “military end users” in Myanmar, China, Russia and Venezuela.</p> <p>U.S. exports to Cambodia in 2019 totaled \$5.6 billion. The amount of military-related U.S. exports to Cambodia was not immediately available. The U.S. is the largest export market for Cambodia, a major</p>

garments manufacturing hub, but three-quarters of Cambodia's imports are from China and other countries in Asia.

The U.S. halted military assistance to Cambodia following a 1997 coup in which the country's leader, Hun Sen, grabbed full power after ousting his co-premier, Prince Norodom Ranariddh. Hun Sen remains prime minister. In August 2005, President George W. Bush waved the ban, citing Phnom Penh's agreement to exempt Americans in Cambodia from prosecution by the Netherlands-based International Criminal Court.

Since direct military ties between the two countries were restored in 2006, the U.S. has pledged millions in military aid to Cambodia, initially to help improve its border security and peacekeeping operations.

China is Cambodia's biggest investor and closest political partner. It was the chief backer of the murderous regime of Pol Pot in the 1970s and has long maintained strong relations with Hun Sen, who has ruled for more than 30 years and grown increasingly repressive.

Beijing's support allows Cambodia to disregard Western concerns about its poor record in human and political rights, and in turn Cambodia generally supports Beijing's geopolitical positions on issues such as its territorial claims in the South China Sea.

The construction of new Chinese military facilities at Cambodia's Ream Naval Base is a point of strong contention with Washington.

Ream faces the Gulf of Thailand, adjacent to the South China Sea, where China has aggressively asserted its claim to virtually the entire strategic waterway. The U.S. has refused to recognize China's sweeping claims, and the Navy's 7th Fleet routinely sails past Chinese-held islands in what it terms freedom of navigation operations.

In recent years, Hun Sen's government has cracked down on the political opposition, shut media outlets and forced hundreds of Cambodian politicians, human rights activists and journalists into exile.

Human rights groups say the government has engaged in arbitrary arrests and other abuses and worked to portray peaceful dissent over corruption, land rights and other issues as attempts to overthrow the government.

Corruption is another major concern.

The Treasury Department sanctions targeted the director general of the defense ministry's material and technical services department and a commander in the Royal Cambodian Navy.

In a statement, Treasury alleged that in 2020 and 2021, the two conspired with other Cambodian officials to inflate costs of a construction project at the Ream base and then planned to use the funds for their own benefit.

Washington has protested over work done at Ream, which officials said involved the demolition of two U.S. funded buildings without notification or explanation to the U.S.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	12/09 Traveling? Covid tests costs widely vary
SOURCE	https://www.msn.com/en-us/travel/news/coronavirus-tests-are-needed-for-international-travel-but-they-can-cost-more-than-a-flight/ar-AARDSud
GIST	Thinking of traveling internationally? On top of uncertainty over waves linked to the delta variant and the emergence of the omicron variant , there's the matter of those coronavirus tests needed to travel: Per person, they can cost hundreds of dollars depending on the place of departure, the destination, the type of test and the company providing them.

While many countries offer free or subsidized coronavirus testing, when it comes to tests to meet travel requirements, governments often [rely on or require](#) private companies to administer them, rather than strained public health systems.

The cost of doing business in a volatile industry, coupled with limited government oversight of prices and services, has yielded some startling results.

PCR test prices for travel can vary widely — and for many individuals and families, prohibitively — from under \$10 in [Mumbai](#) to about \$80 [in Kenya](#) to nearly \$400 in [Kansai, Japan](#). Less sensitive rapid antigen tests, required within 24 hours of flying to the United States [as of Dec. 3](#), can cost about \$50 in Britain — and \$134 at the [airport in Oslo](#).

Just within Europe, PCR tests for travel can be [several times the cost](#) of a one-way flight between countries. In West Africa, where airfare between neighbors was already notoriously costly, PCR testing requirements for arrivals can add on hundreds of dollars, [Quartz Africa reported](#).

In a September survey by the D.C.-based International Air Transportation Association, 70 percent of passengers said the cost of testing was “[a significant barrier to travel](#).”

PCR tests are the gold standard for detecting the coronavirus. Many countries require a negative PCR result within 48 or 72 hours of travel to enter; others mandate tests upon arrival depending on vaccination status.

Some governments have imposed price controls: In August, the United Arab Emirates mandated a nearly \$14 PCR test price cap and a 24-hour turnaround. In India’s Maharashtra state, regular PCR tests are set at \$8. As of early December, [rapid PCR tests at the state’s Mumbai airport](#) are capped at just over \$50.

France had been offering free coronavirus testing for tourists — until it changed its policy in July, citing how French tourists had to pay in other countries. The tourist price was set at \$55 for a PCR test and about \$33 for an antigen test, [France 24 reported](#).

But with the turnaround for free or insurance-covered testing taking days in many cities and countries, those who can afford it may opt to pay high fees for fast results from private providers to ensure they meet travel conditions.

Following the omicron variant’s emergence, Britain in early December began requiring anyone entering its borders to take a PCR test from a private provider and quarantine until the test returned negative. That raised the appeal of same-day test results — with those who could afford it paying about \$170, double the price for the typical turnaround.

Like in many countries, Britain’s coronavirus testing market has been marred in controversy since the pandemic began.

[Consumers accused private companies, some with links to politicians](#), of returning results late or not at all. A government website listing private providers included companies it had not approved: Some companies advertised tests for just a dozen or so dollars — only to add hidden fees way above the average price. Seeking to game the alphabetical list, others added numbers or punctuation to the start of company names so they’d be listed higher.

Avi Lasarow, CEO of Prenetics, a Britain-based company that tests for the coronavirus and other health issues, said the cost to conduct a PCR test is only about \$26. But he said his company priced the test just under \$85 because money was needed to cover the cost of 24-hour customer service and the 20 percent value-added tax (VAT) the government imposed on testing. Also, if a test is positive for the coronavirus, the provider must pay to genetically sequence the sample, a process that can cost hundreds of dollars.

“I think governments are doing their absolute best as they can as the [coronavirus testing] market matures to put guidelines and regulations in place,” Lasarow said.

Problems occur, he continued, “if companies or individuals take advantage of that.”

[A report released in September](#) by Britain’s Competition and Markets Authority found that “the prices charged to many consumers [for coronavirus tests] are not explained by high direct costs and that extremely high markups on gross costs are being applied by some of the retail test providers listed on the GOV.UK website.”

The agency called for “a combination of regulation and enforcement” but did not endorse a price cap, instead calling on the Department of Health and Social Care to conduct further research.

[The Future of Aviation Group](#), a cross-party organization of British lawmakers lobbying for the aviation sector, in November called on the government to consider nixing VAT for coronavirus testing and other “options to bring the cost of testing down to a minimum or ideally free of charge.”

In the meantime, Britain’s biggest travel and tourism firm, Tui, and airlines such as British Airways, Ryanair and easyJet, have partnered with private providers to offer customers testing discounts.

Other efforts at reform have stalled. This past summer, lawmakers in the European Union’s Renew Europe party pushed for free coronavirus testing for travel within the 27-member bloc, said Sophie in ’t Veld, a Dutch party member. Others pushed back, citing how testing prices, vaccination rates and everyday costs of living vary widely across the continent. E.U. lawmakers in June instead agreed to allocate about \$110 million for member states to subsidize testing costs for specific groups, such as those who frequently cross borders for work or family.

It was “the minimal” that could be done, in ’t Veld said.

Juhi Kore, 24, an Indian citizen studying at Oxford University in Britain, has not been home in two years to see her family. She was hoping to buy tickets to visit in Christmas — but factoring in the costs of coronavirus tests, on top of flights and all the uncertainty over travel restrictions, “being reunited with them in 2021 seems completely impossible,” she said.

Travel “feels extremely exclusionary for anyone other than the upper socioeconomic classes,” she added.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	12/08 States deploy National Guard in pandemic
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2021/12/08/us/maine-new-york-covid-national-guard/index.html
GIST	<p>(CNN)The governors of Maine and New York deployed the National Guard in response to dangerously low capacity at statewide medical facilities due to the pandemic.</p> <p>The New York National Guard announced Wednesday that it had deployed 120 medics and medical technicians to a dozen long-term care facilities statewide. The deployment came at the behest of Gov. Kathy Hochul, who issued the order last week in response to staffing shortages.</p> <p>Service members deployed to facilities in Syracuse, Rochester, Albany, Buffalo, Utica, Plattsburgh, Uniondale, Liberty, Vestal, Olean, Lyons and Goshen, the Guard said in a statement.</p> <p>New York mayor’s office reaches vaccine mandate deals with 20 unions but not NYPD or FDNY New York mayor's office reaches vaccine mandate deals with 20 unions but not NYPD or FDNY Hochul has indicated that she may deploy the Guard to hospitals as well -- as of last week, some 50 hospitals in northern New York had less than 10% bed capacity in large part due to lack of staff.</p> <p>In Maine, Gov. Janet Mills activated the National Guard following a spike in Covid-19 cases.</p>

"I do not take this action lightly, but we must take steps to alleviate the strain on our health care system and ensure care for all those who need it," Mills said in a statement.

The state reported a record-high of 379 people hospitalized with Covid-19 as of Wednesday, 60 of whom were on ventilators.

Mills' office said in a statement Wednesday that Maine had only 42 ICU beds available statewide.

Some 73% of Maine residents have received a full initial dose of Covid-19 vaccine, according to state data, with 16% of the population receiving a booster shot.

New Hampshire governor calls on FEMA and National Guard to prepare for winter Covid-19 surge

In preparation for the winter surge, Gov. Christopher Sununu is calling on the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the National Guard to help the state prepare for the Covid-19 winter surge.

"We reached out to FEMA to request some staffing assistance in our healthcare facilities, preparing for the winter surge," Sununu said in his Covid-19 news conference Wednesday. "They did indicate to us that they'd be sending a few dozen individuals to New Hampshire to help out, with the first 24-person team arriving as early as this weekend."

Sununu said that the extra staffing will allow hospitals to open entire wings so that they can better serve their community.

FEMA will also be assisting by providing 30 paramedics who will be arriving in New Hampshire by the end of next week.

"We are assigning those 30 paramedics to hospitals with the highest COVID burden," Sununu said.

According to Sununu, officials have been engaging with hospitals across the state to see how they can best utilize the National Guard during the winter surge.

He announced that in the coming weeks, the state will be deploying an initial group of 70 men and women from the National Guard to help hospitals where the need is most severe, assisting with tasks that will allow for a smoother operation.

The National Guard will assist with "everything from soup, food service or clerical tasks -- things that can just flex, allow a hospital or healthcare facility to flex their own internal staff for better coordination of effort and ultimately better health care services," he said.

Dr. Benjamin Chan, state epidemiologist for the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services, who also attended the news conference, reported that 1,184 people were diagnosed with Covid-19 Wednesday.

"Over the last week we have averaged between 1200 to 1300 new infections each day, and there are currently 9,868 people with active infection," he said. "Our test positivity rate continues to be high." Chan said that hospitalizations and deaths have also continued to increase.

"Currently there are 462 people hospitalized statewide with COVID-19, and unfortunately, we have 11 new deaths from COVID-19 to report today, bringing the total number of people that have died from COVID-19 to 1,768."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	12/09 CDC travel warnings hit Europe hot spots
SOURCE	https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/new-us-covid-travel-warnings-hit-european-hot-spots-rcna7993

PARIS — U.S. [travel warnings](#) are hitting longtime American [tourist hot spots](#) where it hurts, with some who depend on the dollar describing their situation as desperate.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention this week advised Americans to avoid traveling to France, [Portugal](#) and several other European destinations, as well as to Jordan and Tanzania, citing concern over high rates of Covid-19. These destinations now join more than 70 other countries on the “Level 4: Very High” list, which also includes [Germany](#), the [United Kingdom](#) and [Denmark](#).

In Europe as a whole, American arrivals have fallen from more than 36 million in 2019 to just 7 million in 2021, according to the European Travel Commission, a nonprofit group that promotes Europe as a tourist destination. And arrivals are down in Western Europe this year by 80 percent compared to 2019.

“Desperation is a word we hear from travel entrepreneurs,” said Eduardo Santander, executive director of the European Travel Commission.

“They thought they were going to be fine and now it starts again. The impact of Americans not coming to Europe is something that can leave a huge dent in the income of many destinations.”

In Paris, the familiar lengthy lines outside major museums and the Eiffel Tower have thinned out dramatically since the pandemic hit, and sidewalks in the capital are easier to traverse. Restaurants that were once filled with a cacophony of different languages are now largely frequented by French speakers.

English, once commonly used in the city, is now seldom heard.

For Steeve Calvo, founder of The Americans in Paris tour company, said Monday's advisory for [France](#) came just as tourists were starting to return.

“Christmas is my high peak season,” he said in a phone interview on Tuesday. “Since last night, I have been receiving phone calls and emails asking me to cancel hotels, visits or postpone tours. Americans were beginning to really travel to France again, but now they are scared that if something happens on a trip they will not be protected.”

The year [before the pandemic](#) hit, American visitors made up nearly 10 percent of the 38.5 million tourists to Paris, according to the Paris Convention and Visitors Bureau. North American arrivals to the capital are now forecast to be down nearly 56 percent for 2021 compared to 2019.

“Americans are big travelers and big spenders,” said Marcelo Risi, the director of communications for the U.N. World Tourism Organization. “I was in Lisbon, Portugal, for a long weekend recently and it was packed with Americans. In Madrid, where we are headquartered, U.S. tourists are top of the rank. The new advisory is a blow to markets who have long established relationships with the U.S. and the outbound market.”

Countries like the U.S. have put out [restrictions](#) and advisories on travel since the pandemic began. The [European Union recommended](#) in June that its member countries lift restrictions on inbound American travelers, though it took until [November for the U.S.](#) to partially lift restrictions on visitors from a number of European countries.

For Americans traveling abroad, the [CDC classifies](#) its travel recommendations for countries into four categories, with level 4 being the highest.

Travel companies and international organizations have criticized many of the travel measures that countries have implemented since the pandemic began.

The World Health Organization has put out guidance encouraging countries to take an “evidence-informed and risk-based approach when implementing travel measures,” and has said that blanket travel bans will not prevent the international spread of Covid-19.

	<p>This is guidance that Peter Perantonakis, the director of TripUSAFrance, based in Arlington, Virginia, agrees with. Founded six years ago, his tour business focusing on small tours to France was just beginning to flourish when the pandemic hit. As it started to recover this year, the new CDC advisory on France came in.</p> <p>“It’s been pretty rough, and these travel advisories hit a nerve with me because I don’t see what the point of putting these things out when we have the same problem in our own country,” he said.</p> <p>Tour operators like Calvo and Perantonakis are at pains to point out that the vaccination rate in France is high and that health safety measures taken there are strong and often superior to those taken in parts of the U.S.</p> <p>“Americans arrived and they were surprised how well organized the French were and how respectful they were to respect health rules and wearing masks,” Calvo said.</p> <p>As governments watch how the omicron variant will affect public health, tourism groups are pushing for countries to work together and come up with joint solutions to travel so the industry can begin to recover.</p> <p>“The tourism industry is fragile, and we can’t extend this pain much longer,” Santander said.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	12/08 L.A. school district fires hundreds
SOURCE	https://www.foxnews.com/us/los-angeles-school-fires-employees-vaccine
GIST	<p>Hundreds of Los Angeles school employees have been fired for not complying with a district vaccine requirement, the Los Angeles Unified School District said.</p> <p>As of Tuesday, 496 LAUSD employees were terminated but may be eligible to get their jobs back if they chose to get vaccinated against COVID-19.</p> <p>"We care deeply about all of our employees," Interim Superintendent Megan Reilly said in a statement. "Parting ways with individuals who choose not to be vaccinated is an extremely difficult but necessary decision to ensure the safety of all in our school communities. We wish everyone the best in their future endeavors and encourage everyone to get vaccinated."</p> <p>The district, the second largest in the United States, initially set an Oct. 15 deadline for its 73,000 employees to be fully vaccinated. That date was eventually extended to Nov. 15.</p> <p>As a result, nearly 99% of LAUSD employees chose to get vaccinated, the district said.</p> <p>"While we support and encourage vaccination for our entire school community, we believe LAUSD's punitive approach is shutting the doors on experienced and dedicated school workers and exacerbating staffing shortages that already existed before the pandemic that, ultimately, affect student services," the SEIU Local 99, the union representing many district employees, told Fox News in a statement.</p> <p>"We continue in negotiations with the district and are demanding that LAUSD honor the re-employment rights of workers by following a reduction-in-force process which will grant all workers up to 39 months to return to LAUSD when they are vaccinated," the statement continued.</p> <p>Students eligible for the vaccine have until Jan. 10, 2022 to be fully vaccinated unless they have a qualified exemption.</p> <p>About 85% percent of the district's nearly 630,000 students have complied with the mandate that those 12 and older get vaccinated.</p>

	"The science is clear – vaccinations are safe and effective and are an essential part of the multi-layered protection against COVID-19," an LAUSD statement said.
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	12/09 China property firms default \$1.6B bonds
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/evergrande-stock-china-default-bonds-fitch-chinese-market-intervention/
GIST	<p><i>Beijing</i> — Two major Chinese property firms have defaulted on \$1.6 billion worth of bonds to overseas creditors, Fitch Ratings agency said Thursday, as contagion spreads within the country's debt-ridden real estate sector. China's government sparked a crisis within the property industry when it launched a drive last year to curb excessive debt among real estate firms as well as rampant consumer speculation.</p> <p>Companies that had accrued huge debt to expand suddenly found the taps turned off and began struggling to complete projects, pay contractors and meet both domestic and foreign repayments.</p> <p>Real estate behemoth Evergrande has been the highest profile firm embroiled in the crisis, struggling for months to raise capital to pay off \$300 billion in debt.</p> <p>On Thursday, Fitch confirmed the company had defaulted for the first time on more than \$1.2 billion worth of bond debt, as it downgraded the firm's status to a restricted default rating.</p> <p>Fitch also confirmed Kaisa, a smaller property company but one of China's most indebted, had also defaulted on \$400 million of bonds.</p> <p>Evergrande's troubles first surfaced in the summer when it made clear how heavily leveraged the firm had become. The eye-watering figures shook China's credit markets because the sheer size of the company and the potential fallout should it collapse.</p> <p>Last month it missed its first foreign bond repayment but there was a 30-day grace period attached. That ran out on Tuesday with some bond owners complaining they had yet to be repaid.</p> <p>Questions have swirled over whether Evergrande is simply too big to be allowed to fail, given its collapse could send shock waves through the wider Chinese — and even the global economy.</p> <p>The Biden administration was closely watching the situation unfold in China, U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen told CBS News' "Face the Nation" moderator Margaret Brennan in November. Yellen warned that Evergrande's struggles could have repercussions for the world.</p> <p>"Real estate is an important sector of the Chinese economy. It accounts for about 30% of demand," Yellen told Brennan in the exclusive interview. "A slowdown in China, of course, would have global consequences. China's economy is large, and if China's economy were to slow down more than expected, it certainly could have consequences for many countries that are linked to China through trade."</p> <p>The Federal Reserve warned of direct risks to the U.S. in its latest financial stability report, saying: "Financial stresses in China could strain global financial markets through a deterioration of risk sentiment, pose risks to global economic growth, and affect the United States."</p> <p>But CBS News Asia correspondent Elizabeth Palmer reports that U.S. and European investors have largely accepted that their investments in Evergrande may soon be worthless, and while the company's shares are likely to take a huge hit, stock markets in the West have been anticipating the news and are less likely to be rocked.</p> <p>The Chinese government, meanwhile, has intervened to dismantle Evergrande in an orderly fashion, to avoid a spectacular crash that, in a worst-case scenario, could leave Chinese people who bought homes from the company high and dry.</p>

Return to Top	<p>As "60 Minutes" correspondent Lesley Stahl reported recently, the intervention, and the crackdown on heavily indebted companies, is part of a wider rollback of free market policies in China.</p> <p>Signs now point to Beijing being willing to close the chapter on the 25-year-old real estate empire that has typified China's breakneck growth in recent decades. After Evergrande said on Friday that it may not be able to meet its financial obligations, the government summoned the company's founder and announced several moves that have given the clearest picture yet of Beijing's plans to end the crisis.</p> <p>A new seven-strong "risk management committee" has been set up to manage the restructuring. Only two executives from the company are on the committee -- others include officials from state entities.</p> <p>Guangdong's provincial government is also sending a working team to the company, which analysts at Jefferies said indicated a "potential takeover of Evergrande."</p> <p>Kaisa is China's 27th-largest real estate firm, a minnow compared to Evergrande. But its default will do little to calm investor nerves.</p> <p>According to Bloomberg News, before Thursday, at least 10 lower-rated real estate firms have now defaulted on onshore or offshore bonds since the summer.</p> <p>Before Thursday, Chinese borrowers had defaulted on a record \$10.2 billion of offshore bonds, Bloomberg had reported, with real estate firms accounting for 36 percent of those non-repayments.</p>
-------------------------------	--

HEADLINE	12/08 Child tax credit payments set to expire
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/child-tax-credit-2021-december-last-payment-congress-extension/
GIST	<p>The families of some 61 million children could see their monthly Child Tax Credit payments end after next week if Congress does not move quickly. The Build Back Better Act, which passed in the House, includes a one-year extension of the monthly payments, but the legislation still faces hurdles in the Senate.</p> <p>The IRS has told some lawmakers the bill needs to pass by December 28 for payments to continue smoothly heading into January, according to Senate and House congressional aides. Monthly payments so far have been distributed on or around the 15th of each month, meaning the January 15 payment could be in jeopardy.</p> <p>Eligible families will receive their sixth and final monthly payment as part of the American Rescue Plan on December 15. The payments — \$300 per child under six and \$250 per child ages 6 to 17 — started in July. Now Democratic lawmakers are racing to keep them going.</p> <p>"I'm very concerned. Disruption is the right word, and families have been relying on this to pay the rent, to buy groceries, to pay for a few hours of daycare so they can stay at work," said Senator Michael Bennet, who has been a champion of the extended monthly payments. "We should be fighting very hard not to disrupt it at the end of the year."</p> <p>Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said Wednesday that voting on the president's roughly \$2 trillion social spending agenda, including the extended Child Tax Credit payments, is still on track for before Christmas.</p> <p>"Families need to know that critical programs like the Child Tax Credit will continue uninterrupted," he said Monday. "This program has already done immense good for millions upon millions of families."</p> <p>The American Rescue Plan not only expanded the tax credit and broke it down into monthly payments, it also made the Child Tax Credit fully refundable, meaning families too poor to qualify for the benefit in the past have been able participate. The Build Back Better Act would make that full refundability permanent.</p>

The monthly payments have been credited with reducing the number of children in poverty in the U.S. by more than 40% – which would be wiped out without an extension, the progressive Center on Budget and Policy Priorities warned.

Before the payments, families of 27 million children, including roughly half of Black and Latino children and those in rural communities, received less than the full credit amount received by higher-income children.

An estimated 9.9 million children are at risk of slipping back below the poverty line if the expansion isn't extended, the CBPP found. That includes 3.8 million Latino, 2.9 million White, 2.1 million Black, 426,000 Asian and 280,000 American Indian children.

More broadly, Democratic Senator Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts said Wednesday that it is time for the Senate to act on the Build Back Better package to meet the Christmas deadline.

"We need to get Build Back Better done," Warren said. "We have talked and talked and talked and talked. It's not as if we need to talk some more to figure out what this bill is about and what it does. People need the help."

But Senator Joe Manchin of West Virginia pushed back this week on the process being used to pass the legislation. He also said he cannot say whether he supports the bill yet, having not seen the final text.

"I've never seen a situation where we weren't able to make up whatever you thought time would be lost," Manchin said Wednesday on the urgency surrounding the child tax credit. "I'm just saying whatever happens, it shouldn't be made on the timeliness. You should get the bill right."

However, the White House and House Democrats are urging their Senate counterparts to pass the social spending package quickly.

"Absolutely, we're concerned as should millions of Americans be," said White House press secretary Jen Psaki of the extension Monday, noting it's part of the president's domestic policy agenda.

House members passed the president's social spending agenda along near party lines just before Thanksgiving. However, Democrats face an even tighter challenge in the Senate. They need all 50 Democrats to vote for the legislation for it to pass – with Vice President Kamala Harris casting a tie-breaking vote.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	12/08 Extreme Calif. drought forces changes
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/marin-county-california-water-restrictions-drought/
GIST	<p>Extreme drought in California is forcing drastic measures on the 200,000 residents in Marin County. They have been told to cut their water usage to just 55 gallons a day.</p> <p>A 10-minute shower uses about 25 gallons. A load of laundry uses 40 gallons of water. A single sprinkler head can spray out 15 gallons per minute.</p> <p>The new restrictions mean no refilling swimming pools or fountains. Residents can't wash their car in their driveways, and outdoor irrigation is prohibited.</p> <p>"It's frightening," Fairfax Mayor Stephanie Hellman said of the drought.</p> <p>John Ware and his wife, Margaret, moved to Marin County because of the lush landscape.</p> <p>"There's no irrigation until June," Ware said. "We got a third of an acre of mature trees and plants and flowers and I don't want to lose them."</p>

	<p>The couple just installed two 1,000-gallon tanks to store rainwater.</p> <p>Many homeowners are finding almost 80% of their drinking water goes to irrigation, laundry and toilets.</p> <p>"That's just ridiculous that we're using — think about it — fresh water to flush toilets," said Paul Mann, who installs systems to capture and recycle water for outdoors. It comes with an app that sends an alert when residents use too much.</p> <p>"Imagine if everyone did this," Mann said. "We would have true sustainability despite the crisis that we're in with climate."</p> <p>The biggest water users in Marin County face fines of more than \$500 on top of their regular bill. If there is no rain the next few months, the local reservoirs could be unusable by summer.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	12/08 Cop rolled bike over protester suspended
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/seattle-officer-who-rolled-bike-over-protesters-head-gets-7-day-suspension/
GIST	<p>A Seattle police officer captured on video rolling his bicycle over a protester's head last year has been ordered to serve a seven-day suspension without pay after the city's police watchdog found he used prohibited force and broke department rules around reasonable discretion and professionalism.</p> <p>The officer, identified through city pay and police administrative leave records as Eric D. Walter, 45, is appealing the findings by the city's Office of Police Accountability.</p> <p>Efforts to reach Walter were unsuccessful.</p> <p>In an email Wednesday, Seattle Police Department spokesperson Sgt. Randy Huserik said he did not immediately know whether the suspension had been served, adding: "I can report that the officer is assigned back in patrol."</p> <p>Andrew Myerberg, director of the city's Office of Police Accountability, said during an interview Wednesday the officer's recommended suspension was "on the higher end of discipline" compared to similar cases.</p> <p>"It was not just that he intentionally rolled a bike over a protester's head, but also the significant public attention that negatively impacted SPD that we considered here," Myerberg said.</p> <p>The September 2020 incident, captured on video by several people, drew national attention from news accounts and social media posts showing protests in Seattle and cities nationwide that ignited after a grand jury's decision to not indict police officers in Louisville, Kentucky, for the killing of Breonna Taylor.</p> <p>Videos from the protest in Seattle's Capitol Hill neighborhood showed a protester, later identified as Camillo Massagli, on the ground, just before an officer dressed in black riot gear walked a bike over the protester's head. Other officers later arrested Massagli on investigation of failure to disperse and obstruction, police have said.</p> <p>Massagli, then 26 and known for playing the trumpet during street protests, later said in an Instagram video that he wasn't seriously injured, but he believed the incident showed the officers' "disregard for human life."</p> <p>He later told The Seattle Times in a text: "I cannot use a penal system I reject just for revenge, not in good conscience," when explaining why he didn't want to pursue charges against the officer.</p>

King County Sheriff's Detective Mike Mellis later investigated Walter for assault, but ultimately did not find probable cause and reasoned that he and other officers had a right to forcefully remove protesters from the street that night. The detective opined Walter "purposefully ... rolled his bike over" Massagli's head, but also noted such an action "would not necessarily be expected to cause someone pain," according to OPA's summary, which does not identify Walter by name.

After the Seattle City Attorney's Office subsequently reviewed the case, it [declined to file charges](#), writing in a memo that Massagli "does not wish to participate in the prosecutor's case." OPA launched its investigation after the city attorney declined to file charges.

Walter told OPA investigators that when a captain ordered officers to disperse an unruly crowd that night, both tires on his department-issued bicycle were flat. So, he said, he was wheeling the bike along when the protester got down in the street in front of him, the [summary of the investigation](#), released this week, says.

Walter stated "he needed to stay on his line and could not move as it might confuse the officers following behind him," and contended that he stepped and lifted his bicycle over the protester, denying that he intentionally rolled it over Massagli.

But OPA's review of videos found "no indication that he ever lifted the bicycle while walking over" the protester. The videos also showed there was plenty of room to simply go around the protester, and that right after rolling the tires over the man's head, Walter lifted the bike to push another protester back, the summary states.

"Moreover, OPA does not see any credible assertion that rolling over a prone person lying on the ground with the wheels of a bicycle — flat or not — is appropriate force under SPD policy," the investigation summary says. "There is no legitimate law enforcement need to use such force."

OPA ultimately sustained violations of department standards against Walter for using force when prohibited and failing to use reasonable discretion and striving to be professional. The probe determined as "unfounded" an allegation that Walter failed to adhere to laws, based on the outcome of the criminal investigation.

A disciplinary committee that included Myerberg, an assistant police chief, the officer's captain and a department lawyer ultimately recommended a seven-day suspension for Walter. Interim Police Chief Adrian Diaz agreed with the recommendation and formally notified Walter of the suspension on Nov. 5. Myerberg, who noted Wednesday that the union is appealing the case, said he also didn't know if the officer has served the suspension yet.

Mike Solan, president of the Seattle Police Officers Guild, said in an email Wednesday the police union had no comment about the case at this time.

Hired in 2007, Walter earned a base salary of \$130,471 in 2020 plus another \$20,544 in overtime pay, according to city pay records. One week of his base pay amounts to about \$2,509.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	12/08 Some school jobs harder to fill than others
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/education-lab/in-washington-state-schools-some-jobs-are-harder-to-fill-than-others/
GIST	<p>It's clear that help is wanted in many Washington state schools.</p> <p>In Seattle, dozens of bus routes were suspended indefinitely in the absence of enough drivers. To keep the coronavirus in check, paraeducators and teachers are taking on new lunch safety duties. An apparent lack of substitute teachers in the state's largest school districts forced one-day closures around Veterans Day. And educators say they're burning out.</p>

News coverage and government officials have pointed to labor shortages made worse by the pandemic, and even warned of a mass exodus of teachers. Forty percent of superintendents around the country [surveyed by the newsmagazine Education Week](#) reported their staffing shortages were “severe” or “very severe.”

“We know we’re real thin everywhere,” state Superintendent of Public Instruction Chris Reykdal said in an interview last month.

But there’s more to the story, said University of Washington education researcher Dan Goldhaber, who has studied teacher employment trends for more than a decade. His research suggests that some education jobs are harder to fill than others.

This fall, Goldhaber and another researcher collected data from the websites of almost all Washington state school districts for job listings twice a week between late September and late October, analyzing more than 6,500 different jobs advertised.

They found jobs for people with teaching licenses made up just 11% of the more than 6,500 postings across the state. The most highly sought-after school employees were paraeducators, who in most cases are working with kids with disabilities.

Within teaching, the researchers’ findings, published in a report last month, showed trends that have existed for decades, including that teachers working in special education were in the highest demand. Those workers had nearly double the number of postings compared to elementary school postings, even though the latter is listed as the teaching area with the greatest shortage by the state’s Professional Educator Standards Board. (Special education is listed as second.)

The report also found that the number of postings was higher in low-income districts and in rural areas, where it has always been more difficult to staff people.

“If we’re reporting ... that everything is painful, it’s possible people don’t get the right message,” said Goldhaber. Focusing on the pressure points is important for crafting the right solutions, he said.

Asked of Goldhaber’s findings, Reykdal acknowledged that there are positions that have always been harder to fill. But he defended the state’s position that there are staff shortages across the board.

“I may not disagree with it being a historical issue, but now it’s very acute,” he said, pointing to the number of emergency teaching requests the state has received.

Within the first two months of school, the state issued nearly 2,000 emergency certificates, which allow people who haven’t met the state’s teacher licensing standards to lead a classroom. That’s nearly half the number the state issued for the entirety of the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years. Those are the numbers the state examines when determining where there are shortages.

Goldhaber doesn’t disagree with using this number to draw conclusions about shortages; he has used that data himself. But when those numbers are weighted against other factors, the disparities in need become more apparent.

One of the factors is how many people a school district typically hires in a given job category. It makes sense, for example, that there are more requests for emergency elementary school teachers than for special educators; there are just more of the former working in schools than the latter.

The report takes this difference into account. Even though there are double the number of postings for special educators as there are for elementary teachers, the vacancy rate for special educators is eight times higher than for elementary school teachers.

“There is no doubt in my mind that it’s harder to hire people now than it was last year, but it’s also that special education is harder to staff. If you treat things like they are all the same ... you’re going with a solution that is a mile wide and an inch deep,” he said.

One potential solution: create a salary incentive for hard-to-fill positions, Goldhaber said.

That idea is unpopular among teachers unions, which prefer a pay scale based on teaching experience. Reykdal says he supports the idea that some teacher candidates with experience in another industry, such as tech, should be able to start out at a higher point on the pay scale. A change like that would be decided in bargaining between school districts and unions. He said he would consider encouraging districts to create incentives like this if the “research is clear we need to do something different.”

There were some trends that Goldhaber and his team couldn’t study or place into context, including the historical trends of nonteaching positions such as bus drivers — there just isn’t a ton of existing data on those jobs. Data on substitute teachers — another high-demand position — is also scarce.

As for the causes of the staffing crunches we’re seeing right now, it’s hard to say. Some research suggests school districts have added more staff positions, such as COVID-19 safety monitors, which creates the need to hire more people.

For others, such as bus drivers, it could be that many quit because of the vaccine mandate or because they were demanding better pay and stable work.

A few national surveys have warned of a mass exodus of teachers and other workers this year because of burnout. But it’s hard to get real-time data on how many teachers have left. Neither the state nor researchers have that information.

Teacher attrition is inversely related to unemployment rates, research has found. When the rate of joblessness is high, fewer teachers quit their jobs. Plotted over the past 35 years, teacher attrition in Washington state has only increased by half a percent at the most in a given year, according to a brief Goldhaber co-authored this year.

Departures of full-time K-12 teachers appear “far less severe and widespread” compared with other types of school employees, according to national data cited by news website FiveThirtyEight.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	12/08 Competition: US, China in Africa
SOURCE	https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20211208-competition-between-u-s-china-continues-in-africa
GIST	<p>Tyson Nuthu works in the outdoors industry in Nairobi and sees the presence of China everywhere.</p> <p>“Just look at all the construction projects, from Ngong Road to the western bypass. Everywhere you look, China is active here in Kenya,” he said.</p> <p>Kenya is along the path of Beijing’s Belt and Road Initiative, which is financing infrastructure projects and developing trade routes linking China to the world.</p> <p>Africa is increasingly being seen as a technology hub that is getting the attention of the world’s superpowers, including China and the United States.</p> <p>U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken made his inaugural visit to the African continent in mid-November. He started his tour in Nairobi, the capital of Kenya, an American ally deeply indebted to China. His four-day tour also included visits to Senegal and Nigeria.</p> <p>U.S.-China Competition A study by the Brookings Institution, a nonprofit public policy organization based in Washington,</p>

described the trade relationship between the U.S. and sub-Saharan Africa as “underdeveloped,” despite the U.S. prioritization of sub-Saharan African exports under the Generalized System of Preferences.

According to the China Africa Research Initiative at Johns Hopkins University’s School of Advanced International Studies, annual U.S. foreign direct investment (FDI) flows have been declining since 2010.

[The first Forum on China-Africa Cooperation](#) (FOCAC), which was held in Beijing in November of 2006, welcomed the adoption of a declaration and action plan for a “new type of strategic partnership.” Since then, Chinese foreign direct investment (FDI) flow to Africa [grew significantly](#), exceeding that of the United States since 2013.

African Views of China’s Presence

But how do those on the African continent view this inflow of Chinese investment?

In an interview with VOA, John Calabrese, the director of American University’s Middle East-Asia Project, said discernment between government and society is critical.

“African perceptions of Chinese investment vary greatly,” he said. Chinese companies have imported laborers and inundated markets with cheap items, which has “bred some resentment at the societal level,” especially among small and local African businesses.

“Wide reporting — and to some extent, the exaggeration of cases — of Chinese ‘debt trap diplomacy’ have created something of a backlash,” Calabrese said in an email. “To repair the reputational damage as well as to protect and further advance its economic penetration on the continent, Beijing has attempted to ‘revise’ its lending practices.”

African Views of U.S. Presence

Josh Maiyo, a lecturer at United States International University specializing in China-Africa political ecology, said in the aftermath of the war on terror, the U.S. has given up on the democratization process. Its primary focus now is on the security of the African continent.

“The rest of Africa has essentially been forgotten,” Maiyo said in a phone interview with VOA. “From the African perspective, the U.S. has been countering Chinese advancement more than anything else. It’s only been token engagements with no concrete programs to offer or coordinated, structural approaches.”

Sincerity is paramount for the U.S. to have successful relations with African nations, said Gustavo de Carvalho, a senior researcher at the South Africa-based Institute for Security Studies. [When interviewed](#) last month by the United States Institute of Peace, Carvalho said the African continent as a whole has too much experience with “the conditionality of engagements that reduce African voices to mere aid recipients rather than equal counterparts.”

“The U.S. should ... equally engage on how its approaches are conducted and perceived by local and national actors,” Carvalho said. “Africans see very clearly that the United States is inconsistent in promoting transparency and anti-corruption policies — a principle it dilutes in its relationship with Saudi Arabia, for example. This can leave Africans feeling that the U.S. is condescending in its relations to them.”

“U.S. attention to Africa has waxed and waned over the years,” American University’s Calabrese noted. Although commitments to global health threats such as HIV/AIDS, malaria and ebola have been instrumental, Calabrese’s concern about continuity persists.

“U.S.-Africa policy might amount to a collection of ad-hoc initiatives and not a coherent strategy,” he said.

US Response

“As the United States and our partners further develop and implement the Build Back Better World

initiative, we recognize that robust, meaningful partnerships will be critical to ensure that Build Back Better World delivers infrastructure that meets the needs of middle and lower-income countries,” a senior White House official said in a written statement to VOA.

In a November 19 speech in Nigeria, Blinken said his trip reflected “the breadth and depth of our partnerships in Africa – how we’re working together to find innovative solutions to new challenges, and how we’re investing in long-term sources of strength, rather than short-term fixes.”

In response to VOA’s inquiry, the U.S. State Department referred to [Blinken’s November 21 interview with the BBC](#), where he said, “our Africa policy is about Africa, not about China...it’s premised on this basic reality Everything that we seek to do in the world to make progress for our own people cannot be done without Africa.”

“We’re delighted to have the U.S. back supporting the multilateral system,” said Geoffrey Onyeama, Nigeria’s foreign minister, in a press conference with Blinken.

“Our engagement in Africa, with Africa, our partnership with Nigeria, with many other countries is not about China or any other third parties. It’s about Africa. It’s about working together to make the investments in Africa, make the investments in its people,” Blinken said at a press conference in Nigeria.

Perception on the Ground

The perception and popularity of the U.S. in Africa has been lukewarm by some, Maiyo said.

“Traditionally, when the American secretary of state visited Africa, there was a lot of anticipation. This time it barely caused a stir.”

In contrast, analysts and people on the ground are much more aware of China’s presence as an investor in Africa.

“[China] has a shock effect that creates a sense of awareness,” Maiyo said. “In terms of project scale, U.S. investment in infrastructure is not nearly as visible.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	12/08 New CBP commissioner confirmed
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/border-security/senate-vote-for-magnus-gives-cbp-first-confirmed-commissioner-since-2019/
GIST	<p>Eight months after his nomination to lead the nation’s largest federal law enforcement agency, the Senate confirmed Tucson Police Chief Chris Magnus as the agency’s first confirmed commissioner of U.S. Customs and Border Protection since 2019.</p> <p>The vote was 50-47, with Sen. Susan Collins (R-Maine) being the only Republican to vote with the chamber’s Democrats and Independents. The Tucson City Council also voted Tuesday to promote Deputy Chief Chad Kasmar to fill Magnus’ job leading their police department.</p> <p>On Nov. 3, the Senate Finance Committee approved Magnus’ nomination 15-13, with Sen. Bill Cassidy (R-La.) the only Republican to vote in favor of advancing the nominee to the full Senate.</p> <p>CBP has not had a Senate-confirmed commissioner since CBP Commissioner Kevin McAleenan assumed the duties of acting Homeland Security secretary and then resigned that fall. John Sanders only served in the acting commissioner role for fewer than three months before Mark Morgan was moved into the acting commissioner post and served in that capacity until the end of the Trump administration.</p> <p>Troy Miller, who served as director of field operations for CBP’s New York Field Office, has been serving as acting commissioner in the Biden administration.</p>

“He has a strong grasp on the important work CBP does every single day and I look forward to working alongside him,” Miller tweeted Tuesday of Magnus’ confirmation.

In his October confirmation hearing, Magnus told the Senate Finance Committee that it has “been particularly difficult to be a CBP agent, and certainly a Border Patrol agent in the recent past,” stressing that he aims to “help depoliticize this process” of shifting policies and “build in resiliency as a key for helping our men and women, our hard-working men and women of the Border Patrol, be as effective as possible in their jobs.”

“I think it’s going to be important that the individuals who are making the policy decisions, which obviously include the secretary, the president and others, that they get accurate feedback from me based on what I’m seeing in terms of talking to the men and women at the border, in terms of talking people in border communities,” said Magnus, who previously served as chief of police in Fargo, N.D., and Richmond, Calif.

The nominee called it “essential to recognize that what we think of as the border is not homogenous, and there’s no one solution that will provide us with perfect border security.”

“So if confirmed, I will do what I’ve always done in my professional career, which is to uphold the law,” he said. “I will expect without exception that all agency personnel be conscientious, fair and humane when enforcing the law... I believe that by working with Congress, the men and women who serve CBP, and its public- and private-sector partners, that we can build upon its many strengths to make the agency even better.”

Magnus told senators that “preparation is critical” for future influxes of migrants at the southern border, stressing the importance of working with Mexican counterparts on intelligence, coordinating the processing of migrants, and having “more Border Patrol agents out on the line, doing what they were trained to do.”

The nominee said that federal officials “can do a better job with how individuals are processed, but key to this is that it is done humanely.”

“I don’t believe that we have to sacrifice efficiency for humanity. And so I think humanity has to be part of the discussion again, early and often throughout the careers of CBP members. This is something we talk a lot about in policing,” Magnus said. “We do our jobs enforcing the law, but how we engage with the public, even the public that we may be arresting, is what defines us as professionals and this is something that we have a moral obligation to do.”

The confirmation comes as Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas is on a swing through Western states to meet with department employees. On Monday, he met with Immigration and Customs Enforcement and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services employees in Phoenix; on Tuesday, he met with ICE ERO, OPLA, and HSI employees in San Francisco and visited the San Ysidro Port of Entry in Southern California.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	12/08 Gap narrows in Sawant recall vote
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3271313/seattle-city-councilmember-kshama-sawant-recall-results-december-2021/
GIST	<p>Results have narrowed in an attempt to recall Seattle District 3 Councilmember Kshama Sawant. The no votes closed the gap with 49.69%. The recall effort sits at 50.31% — just 246 votes apart.</p> <p>Just over 39,000 ballots have been counted of the 77,579 registered voters as of Wednesday afternoon, according to King County Elections.</p> <p>Despite the initial setback, Sawant addressed a crowd of supporters Tuesday night.</p>

“The initial election results have been reported,” Sawant told the crowd, as documented by Socialist Alternative. “At present, as you all know, the vote against the right wing is 46.9%. And the vote for the recall is 53.1%. In every one of our elections, there has been a dramatic swing after election night in our direction.”

The recall petition levies three separate allegations against Sawant. Those charges are:

- That Sawant violated COVID-19 protocols by admitting protesters into City Hall during a June demonstration
- That Sawant used her position as a city councilmember to lead a protest to Mayor Jenny Durkan’s home, the location of which is confidential due to Durkan’s time as a U.S. Attorney
- That Sawant misused council resources to promote her Tax Amazon ballot initiative

In the event Sawant is recalled, she would be removed from office as soon as the election is certified. [Seattle’s city charter mandates](#) that the remaining city councilmembers subsequently appoint an interim District 3 representative within 20 days.

The interim councilmember replacing Sawant would serve in her seat until the next regularly scheduled general election in November 2022. The winner of that election would serve out the remainder of Sawant’s term, which expires in 2023. District 3 voters would then have to go to the ballot box again in 2023 to vote for a councilmember who would serve a full four-year term through 2027.

Sawant would be eligible to run for the District 3 seat in both 2022 and 2023. She last won reelection to city council in 2019 by a 52% to 48% margin over challenger Egan Orion.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	12/08 Russia military movements near Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/12/08/russia-ukraine-satellite-images/
GIST	<p>Since at least October, Russian military movements near the Ukrainian border have been prompting worries among U.S. and European officials about the possibility that Moscow is preparing to launch a large-scale offensive in Ukraine early next year.</p> <p>The White House believes Russian President Vladimir Putin hasn’t made up his mind but is preparing his forces for the possibility of an operation — a suggestion the Kremlin has denied.</p> <p>According to an unclassified U.S. intelligence analysis obtained by The Washington Post last week, a large-scale offensive could come to include as many as 175,000 Russian forces, including reservists being mobilized by the Russian armed forces.</p> <p>The analysis stated that some 70,000 Russian forces are already near the border with Ukraine. Though it is unclear how the analysis arrived at that number, a significant portion of those are probably forces permanently stationed at military facilities near Russia’s western border and in Crimea, a peninsula Russia forcibly annexed from Ukraine in 2014.</p> <p>Some of the forces and materiel, however, have moved toward the Ukrainian border from other places in Russia, including as far away as Siberia.</p> <p>Satellite images offer a partial snapshot of the materiel associated with those forces currently being housed in proximity to Ukraine.</p> <p>Yelnya</p> <p>For weeks, military analysts have been keeping an eye on the small Russian city of Yelnya, southeast of Smolensk. The city — not far from the Ukrainian border — is home to the headquarters of the Russian army’s 144th Motor Rifle Division. But the division recently has had some guests.</p>

Satellite images...show vehicle stores at the division's garrison that were established in October. The equipment includes more than 500 armored vehicles, Iskander road-mobile ballistic missile launchers, artillery, communications and logistics support, according to the defense analysis firm Janes.

The equipment most likely belongs to the 41st Combined Arms Army, normally located in Siberia, and the 90th Tank Division, based near the Ural Mountains, according to Janes.

Much of the force and its equipment first moved to the western part of Russia near the city of Voronezh during a buildup near the Ukrainian border in March and April. Then, the Russian military said it was keeping the materiel in the area to use during planned exercises in the area this September. After those exercises took place, however, the materiel didn't return home but went to Yelnya instead, according to Janes.

Pogonovo

A Russian military training ground called Pogonovo, south of Voronezh, has attracted attention from analysts all year.

In March and April, during Russia's first buildup of 2021, the site hosted much of the equipment from the Central Military District that has now moved to Yelnya, according to Janes. Once that equipment emptied out, the site began hosting new materiel associated with elements of the 1st Guards Tank Army, normally based outside Moscow.

The images...show two garrisons at the Pogonovo training grounds, each of which appears to be hosting a battalion-size element of around 30 main battle tanks, according to Janes. In addition to the tanks, other materiel has flowed into the site, including howitzers, thermobaric multiple rocket launchers and long-range multiple rocket launchers, Janes said.

The defense analysis group noted that there isn't enough accommodation at the site to house sufficient personnel to operate the materiel, suggesting the equipment is being forward deployed.

Russian forces have begun to construct additional dividing walls within the main garrison — one of which is completely empty...— suggesting additional equipment is expected here, according to Janes.

Crimea

Analysts have also been tracking movements of Russian forces in Crimea. Russia has built up its military presence on the peninsula since its takeover in 2014, making the region a likely staging ground for any new operation in Ukraine.

The images...show a vehicle garrison on the southern coast of Crimea.

Janes said the garrison — first established in late 2020 but expanded this year — houses large numbers of main battle tanks, self-propelled howitzers and towed howitzers, probably belonging to units from the 58th Combined Arms Army, headquartered in faraway Vladikavkaz. Janes said those units deployed to the area during the first buildup last spring.

There is a large, empty storage site on the west side of the garrison that probably will be used to store additional equipment or provide troop accommodation in the event of an offensive, according to Janes. As it stands, there appears to be insufficient accommodation on-site to house enough personnel to operate the tanks and weaponry, Janes said.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	12/08 Industries workers quit the most
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2021/12/08/where-workers-quitting-jobs/
GIST	The Great Resignation continued into October with 4.2 million Americans quitting their jobs that month, according to new data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Hospitality and food, retail and arts, and

entertainment and recreation continued to see high rates of workers quitting, although the numbers were down from summer peaks.

Workers continued to leave their jobs at record rates in health care, social assistance and nondurable goods manufacturing. Demand for new hires remains high in those industries as job openings continue to increase.

In some industries, hiring can barely keep up with separations, a broader measure that includes retirements, layoffs and resignations. The pandemic has spurred not only a record number of resignations, but also has caused a [wave of early retirements](#) that has increased separations across the labor market.

Although hundreds of thousands of workers were hired in October, so many left their jobs in some industries that total employment remained practically unchanged.

The health-care and social-assistance sectors experienced high rates of separations with relatively little hiring in October. Pandemic exhaustion is one factor in an area of the economy that has experienced record levels of quitting since March of this year. A majority of health-care workers have reported [burnout](#), and some say [morale](#) has hit a new low this fall.

The labor market is also tight in retail, where workers have faced [new strains under the pandemic](#) and may have safety concerns in highly public-facing roles. Across all industries, the strong job market has prompted people to seek positions with higher pay and better conditions.

"The pandemic is still in the driver's seat," said Daniel Zhao, senior economist at the job site Glassdoor. "A lot of people think the Great Resignation is about burned-out office workers, but it's really about these front-line service workers in jobs where there are a lot of covid risks and also a tight labor market."

For many, the Great Resignation has been an opportunity to [reassess their career path](#) after the enforced pause linked to lockdowns early in the pandemic. And not all who want to go back to work are finding the [work and benefits they are seeking](#).

Whenever these workers are ready to return, the job market is ready for them, with a huge amount of demand in industries such as health care and food services, and in some cases, with [big pay increases waiting](#).

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	12/08 'Remain in Mexico' program resumes
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/immigration/remain-in-mexico-restarts-biden/2021/12/08/33184c3c-570f-11ec-929e-95502bf8cdd5_story.html
GIST	<p>CIUDAD JUAREZ, Mexico — More than 30 migrants had their asylum cases processed in El Paso this week and are expected to be transported back to Mexico as part of the resumption of a Trump-era program that requires asylum seekers to wait outside U.S. territory while their claims are processed.</p> <p>The program, formally known as the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) and referred to as the "Remain in Mexico" policy, was reinstated after the Biden administration and Mexican government reached a deal earlier this month. Border-crossing migrants from countries in the Western Hemisphere can now begin the legal process for asylum in the United States but must return to Mexico while they await the adjudication of their claims, which can take months.</p> <p>President Biden ended MPP earlier this year, allowing thousands of asylum seekers in high-crime areas of northern Mexico to pursue their cases within U.S. borders. But Republicans in Texas and Missouri sued, and a federal judge ordered the administration to restart it with Mexico's consent, a decision upheld by the Supreme Court.</p>

Biden's Department of Homeland Security has said security and legal enhancements will distinguish its program from that of the Trump administration, which resulted in a backlog in cases and led to the creation of migrant refugee camps along the U.S.-Mexico border.

At a briefing earlier this month, [a DHS official told reporters](#) "Mexico has demanded a number of humanitarian improvements as conditions of agreeing to accept enrollees," including guarantees that asylum seekers will have access to legal counsel and that their humanitarian claims will be processed within six months.

"These are improvements we agree with," added the official, who briefed reporters on the condition of anonymity under rules set by DHS. Asylum seekers placed in the MPP program will also be offered a [coronavirus](#) vaccine while in the United States.

But the administration also continues to argue that MPP is "imposing substantial and unjustifiable human costs," [according to a refiled legal memo](#) to terminate the program.

It's a pattern of perplexing contradiction, immigration advocates say.

"Yet again, we see the Biden administration breaking its own campaign promises and falling far afield from where they promised to be on border and immigration policy," said Shaw Drake, policy director for the American Civil Liberties Union Border Rights Center in El Paso. "The reimplementing of MPP by this administration is going well beyond what is required of them by court order."

Two of the people who entered El Paso on Monday to begin their legal quest for asylum returned to Ciudad Juárez on Wednesday morning — a day later than expected after the process hit a temporary snag and coordination issues, officials said.

Both declined to be interviewed.

The rest remain in U.S. Customs and Border Protection custody in El Paso and it is not clear when they might be sent back.

The United States and Mexico have enlisted the help of nongovernmental and humanitarian organizations to smooth out coordination and provide shelter and legal help for the asylum seekers.

In Ciudad Juárez, shelters are building capacity in anticipation of growing numbers of migrants. The municipal-run Kiki Romero shelter expects 30 to 35 MPP enrollees every day of the week to rotate into their converted gymnasium, outfitted with metal bunk beds for up to 200 people, according to human rights director Santiago Gonzalez Reyes.

But advocates said this week they are skeptical that MPP can operate any better than it did under the previous administration. Father Hector Trejo, who directs two Ciudad Juárez shelters, said he is doubtful the new MPP offers anything more than a mirage of hope.

The first time MPP was implemented, in 2019, asylum seekers stuck in Mexico struggled to find housing, leading to the formation of a makeshift refugee camp on the country's northern border.

The Mexican government also struggled to keep migrants safe, particularly those returned to dangerous cities in the state of Tamaulipas. Human Rights First, a New York-based nonprofit organization, recorded at least 1,544 "violent attacks" against migrants returned to Mexico.

Mexican officials rarely spoke critically of the policy's first iteration in public. Some privately suggested that the program was successful in deterring migration.

But as the second iteration of MPP neared under Biden, the Mexican government raised a number of humanitarian concerns about migrants who would be processed under the policy, ranging from vaccine access to housing and security.

After the U.S. addressed many of those concerns, the Mexican foreign ministry released a statement last week saying it would allow asylum seekers to wait in Mexico “for humanitarian reasons and on a temporary basis.”

The United Nations’ International Office of Migration in Mexico is assisting both governments to try to mitigate some of MPP’s negative impacts. It is offering safe transport for migrants to and from court hearings and helping shelters improve capacity.

It is also pushing Mexico to provide migrants with documents and ID numbers that would allow them to work legally, open bank accounts and access services while they wait.

“We’ve been very clear that MPP should end and it is not a positive measure or policy,” said deputy chief of mission Jeremy MacGillivray. “But we are confident there is a genuine desire to make living conditions better for migrants and will be monitoring it closely.”

Still, critics of the policy warn that Mexico is again participating in controversial U.S. deterrence measures with no guarantees migrants will be protected.

“Mexico once again is assuming a great deal of the costs and the risks of this irregular program which violates many rights inscribed in U.S. and international law, as well as Mexico’s own laws,” said Tonatiuh Guillén López, Mexico’s former immigration chief.

“The supposed humanitarian adjustments aren’t clear and haven’t materialized, and they most likely won’t comply with the needs of shelter, protection, or access to health care and legal assistance,” Guillén added.

Kennji Kizuka, a senior researcher and policy analyst at Human Rights First, said he worries commitments to migrant security and rapid case resolution will be abandoned as the numbers of asylum seekers climb.

“Unfortunately, the experience from the last implementation was that promises weren’t fulfilled, services that were supposed to be provided never happened,” he said. “I would worry that the same thing is going to happen again.”

Advocates like Hannah Hollandbyrd of El Paso-based Hope Border Institute said they will be watching how the improvements the Biden administration touted in court filings will play out in reality.

DHS officials said U.S. Customs and Border Protection officers will proactively ask migrants if they fear returning to Mexico — a major distinction from the Trump-era version when the question wasn’t posed. If they say yes, asylum seekers have at least 24 hours to consult with counsel and explain any future threats they may face.

While MPP may open a window for some, its enrollees represent a fraction of would-be asylum seekers. Over the course of the coronavirus pandemic, the U.S. has expelled more than 1.4 million migrants under Title 42, a public health law.

Expulsion flights carrying Central Americans land nearly every day in southern Mexico, according to Witness at the Border, an advocacy group that tracks deportation flights. Those who are deported are generally not given a chance to ask for asylum.

The limited options for migrants to pursue asylum or humanitarian relief pushes people to seek out organized crime to make repeated crossings for a random chance, advocates said.

	“That is a fairly absurd border management policy because it encourages people to continue to play the lottery and keep trying,” immigration attorney Taylor Levy said.
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	12/09 Remote learning as well as classroom? No
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/12/09/global-remote-learning-loss/
GIST	<p>Of all the pandemic edicts — the mask requirements, the vaccination mandates — few were more contentious than the decision to shutter schools. At the peak of closures last year, 1.6 billion students in 188 countries were locked out. Across the globe, 700 million of them reside in partially or fully closed school districts. To learn, the pandemic generation turned to laptops, cellphones, televisions and radios, leaving parents asking a nagging question: Could learning remotely work as well as being in a classroom?</p> <p>For the most part, new data suggests, the answer is no.</p> <p>A comprehensive global report, released this week by UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank, adds to a growing body of evidence that students suffered massive educational losses during the pandemic. Learning setback projections have gone from bad to worse, with a disproportionate hit for poor and otherwise marginalized children regardless of whether they lived in rich and poor countries.</p> <p>The more pessimistic projections — based in part on emerging data from myriad nations — are fueling fears that learning deficits will be an even bigger driver of inequality, both among and within countries, and in a way that may be hard to fix in the years ahead. The pandemic learning gap could widen disparities not only between countries and social classes, but between different generations — those who were school students in 2020 and 2021, and those who weren’t.</p> <p>“We fear that in 15 years we’re going to write a lot of academic papers to identify and understand the negative premium or discount in terms of welfare, productivity and income just for belonging to the generation between 5 and 18 in 2021,” Jaime Saavedra, World Bank Global Director for Education, told me.</p> <p>The burden of missed months in the classroom could linger for a lifetime. Worldwide, the study estimates, the pandemic generation is at risk of losing \$17 trillion in future earnings from knowledge deficits, significantly more than the \$10 trillion estimated last year, the new report concludes. The worse outlook stems from school closures that have lasted longer than earlier estimates and assessments that remote learning often fell short of the mark.</p> <p>So who suffered the worst?</p> <p>Particularly in low- and middle-income nations, the longer schools were closed, the worse the educational losses. The exceptionally long closures in Latin America and South Asia, the study’s authors say, dealt students there an outsize hit. Younger students suffered worse than older students. Girls, some data suggests, suffered steeper losses than boys.</p> <p>The quality of remote learning mattered. In many low- and middle-income countries, teachers were offered substantially less assistance to adapt to remote learning, even as their students had limited to no access to laptops, phones — or even electricity. As a result, the share of children in low- and middle-income countries unable to read and understand a simple text by age 10 is projected to have soared between March 2020 and August 2021, leaping from estimations of 56 percent to 70 percent, according to figures updated after the report’s publication.</p> <p>Data coming in from developing nations across the globe confirms some of the worst fears. In two Mexican states, a survey showed significant learning losses in reading and math for students aged 10 to 15. The share of 10-year-old students who cannot read or understand a simple piece of writing rose 15 percent for richer students and 25 percent for poorer students.</p>

In [Brazil's Sao Paulo state](#), a study showed that on average students engaged in remote learning picked up only 28 percent of what they normally would from in-person classes. Sao Paulo's statewide exams in 2021 showed across-the-board learning deficits compared with 2019, with larger losses for younger students. Math exam scores for fifth-graders slipped dramatically — more than wiping out a decade of improving performance.

The available data on a gender gap in learning losses is somewhat conflicting, but there is worrying evidence that girls might have fared worse. After South African primary-school students missed, on average, 60 percent of the school year, second-graders experienced losses in reading that equate to missing 57 percent to 70 percent of a school year, while fourth-graders showed learning losses equal to missing 62 percent to 81 percent of a school year. Girls — who traditionally outperformed boys there in reading levels — suffered relatively steeper drops. [In Nigeria](#), fathers were found to have discouraged their daughters from using the Internet, and fathers were less likely to help their daughters learn at home than their sons.

When measured by math knowledge, primary schoolchildren in Ethiopia learned only 30 percent to 40 percent as much in 2020 as they would during a normal year, and the learning gap between urban and rural students worsened.

Children in rich nations suffered steep educational losses, too — especially those who were economically disadvantaged. [In Belgium](#), standardized test results also show learning losses, with sharper deficits among disadvantaged students. Evidence from across the United States show significant learning losses in math and reading. [In Texas](#), only 30 percent of third-graders tested at or above grade level in math in 2021, compared with 48 percent in 2019.

The new report is only the latest evidence of the impact of school closures in countries that had virtually everything going for them. The Netherlands, for instance, witnessed a relatively short eight-week lockdown and enjoys high broadband penetration, meaning conditions were optimum for remote learning. Nevertheless, [a study comparing school test scores before and after showed an impact equal to losing one-fifth of the school year](#) — the same amount of time schools remained closed. Outcomes were 60 percent worse for the children of relatively less-educated families.

“The findings imply that students made little or no progress while learning from home and suggest losses even larger in countries with weaker infrastructure or longer school closures,” [the authors wrote in April](#).

There is some reason for hope. In Sao Paulo, for instance, officials say that students have begun to make up some lost ground due to creative solutions including extended school hours and a doubling down on core skills like reading and writing.

Some countries weathered the learning storm far better than others. Before the pandemic, Uruguay, for instance, had invested heavily in social inclusion and technological equality — distributing laptops and offering no-cost Internet to all students and teachers, leaving it exceptionally well-prepared for the switch to remote learning. After the pandemic hit, the country became the first to reopen schools in Latin America, introducing a phased return to classrooms that focused on rural, poor and young students. Studies there have showed a marginal increase in math and reading skills for some school grades.

But globally, post-pandemic learning recovery is set to vary drastically. For too many schoolchildren — especially the disadvantaged, younger students and girls — the price of the pandemic could be a lifetime of opportunity lost.

“Governments have to do extraordinary things because we have been through an extraordinary shock,” Saavedra told me. “Are countries really doing that? Not many, not many, unfortunately.”

HEADLINE	12/08 Hawaii drying out after historic Dec. deluge
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/weather/2021/12/08/hawaii-kona-storm-flooding-snow/
GIST	<p>The Kona storm, which drenched the Hawaiian Islands between Saturday and Tuesday, was finally pulling away Wednesday morning, after producing record-setting rains, flooding and mudslides, mountain snow and historically cool temperatures.</p> <p>Hawaii Gov. David Ige (D) declared a state of emergency Monday due to the sweeping impacts of the powerful storm, which will remain in effect through Friday during cleanup efforts.</p> <p>Some of the storm's heaviest rain hit Honolulu on Monday, dropping 7.92 inches, its wettest December day on record and second-wettest day observed in any month. The torrents caused numerous instances of flash flooding in the capital city, according to the National Weather Service.</p> <p>Several people trapped in floodwaters required rescue in Honolulu, and firefighters responded to 90 storm-related calls, NBC News wrote.</p> <p>"One notable impact was flooding damage to the Iwilei power substation which cut electrical service to Downtown Honolulu businesses and residents," the Weather Service wrote in a storm summary. Thousands of customers also lost power on the Big Island and Maui.</p> <p>Rainfall totals swelled into the double digits on Oahu, Maui and the Big Island, where the highest 48-hour amounts were 11.68, 12.86 and 14.26 inches, respectively, according to the Weather Service.</p> <p>Even heavier rain probably fell on the south-facing mountain slopes on Maui, where the Weather Service estimated more than 20 inches.</p> <p>The Weather Service described "large flash floods" on Maui, where high water shut down sections of major highways on Monday. In the Maui Meadows subdivision, severe flooding damaged homes and washed away several vehicles, the Weather Service wrote.</p> <p>Kona storms derive their name from a word meaning "leeward," referring to the direction their winds come from. As this Kona storm meandered west of the islands for nearly three days, its counterclockwise circulation drove wave after wave of heavy rain inland. As the moist air collided with the south-facing mountain slopes, it was forced to rise, intensifying downpours through a process known as orographic lift.</p> <p>Some years may pass without a single Kona storm affecting Hawaii, while other winters may feature up to four or five, according to the Western Regional Climate Center. This particular storm was a whopper due to its duration, walloping the islands for three straight days.</p> <p>On the high peaks of Mauna Loa and Mauna Kea on the Big Island, towering over 13,000 feet, the storm brought heavy snow and strong winds, prompting a blizzard warning over the weekend. Snow is fairly common on these mountaintops, but this was the first blizzard warning issued in the state since 2018.</p> <p>Webcam views of Mauna Loa and Mauna Kea showed their summits blanketed in snow Wednesday morning.</p> <p>The cold air tapped by the storm, along with persistent cloud cover, brought historically cool weather even near sea level.</p> <p>Sunday's high temperature in Honolulu was 70 degrees. The city has seen highs of 70 degrees or cooler only 15 times since World War II; Sunday's high was the coolest since 1979, and the lowest high temperature ever observed during the month of December, according to Thierry Goose, who tracks temperature extremes around the world.</p> <p>As the storm pulled away Wednesday, the Weather Service in Honolulu had discontinued all flood watches in effect for the islands as of 6 a.m. local time.</p>

HEADLINE	12/08 Climate change: hurricanes sooner, longer
SOURCE	https://www.wired.com/story/climate-change-may-make-hurricanes-hit-sooner-and-last-longer/
GIST	<p>THIS PAST HURRICANE season was a pretty nasty one. With 21 storms from June 1 to November 30, for the second year in a row the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration ran out of names on their official list and had to swap over to a backup. Eight hurricanes hit the United States, and one—Ida—killed at least 82 people and caused an estimated \$60 billion in damage as it churned its way from Louisiana to New Jersey, according to federal officials.</p> <p>But unless things change in a big way, the future will be even worse. In a warmer climate, hurricanes will speed toward the Northeast coast more quickly and then slow down once they arrive, causing more damage and floods in vulnerable coastal communities. In a study published in November in the journal <i>Earth's Future</i>, a team from three universities examined storm tracking data from the past 100 years and used it in a global climate model that takes into account changes in environmental conditions caused by heat-trapping greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide and methane.</p> <p>The researchers focused on the Northeast US, which has the largest population centers living along the coast. “We found that storms are forming a little more north and west in the Atlantic, moving faster toward the Southeast coast and traveling their slowest along the East Coast,” says lead author Andra Garner, an assistant professor of environmental science at Rowan University in New Jersey. “It was a surprising finding.”</p> <p>The study finds that Norfolk, Virginia and Boston will be more at risk from tropical storms by the end of this century, while New York City residents will face slightly less risk. That’s because future storm tracks will likely shift slightly east or west as the hurricanes emerge from their warm-water nursery in a big patch of ocean between the Caribbean and Western Atlantic and are then driven northward by high-level winds, ocean currents, and the curve in their path caused by the rotation of the planet, known as the Coriolis Effect.</p> <p>While previous studies have looked at how climate change may make hurricanes more intense or cause them to drop more rain, this is one of the first to look at how future climate conditions may change their direction and speed. Garner had previously worked on modeling what would happen to New York City if a powerful storm like 2012’s Hurricane Sandy struck under future climate conditions. After looking at the effects of a sea-level rise on New York, she decided to see how these same conditions would affect the path of hurricanes in the Atlantic.</p> <p>Garner and her colleagues simulated 35,000 storms under conditions that assume the world’s societies fail to take drastic action to curb carbon emissions, known as the Representative Concentration Pathway 8.5 scenario (RCP8.5).</p> <p>Under this scenario, humans would pump enough carbon into the atmosphere to boost global warming an average of 8.5 watts per square meter across the planet and raise atmospheric temperatures 4.3 degrees Celsius (or 7.7 degrees Fahrenheit) by the year 2100. This is the so-called “business as usual” scenario that scientists with the International Panel on Climate Change warned nations about in their latest report issued in August, one that United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres called “a code red for humanity.”</p> <p>In their study, Garner and colleagues compared where storms formed, how fast they moved, and where they ended. Comparing data from pre-industrial times to simulations stretching to the end of the 21st century, the study found tropical storms will be 15 percent more likely to begin their life closer to the US Southeast coast. Under the model simulation, storms are more likely to travel within 100 kilometers (62 miles) of both Boston and Norfolk than toward New York City.</p> <p>But Garner says the results don’t mean New Yorkers can breathe easy. While the analysis showed the average storm may stay further out to sea, any individual storm will still pose a risk to the region. She says these future super-storms will move fast while at sea, covering more territory until they hit land and slow</p>

down. This means they could make landfall faster. “One of the impacts we see is that it takes less time to travel to within 100 kilometers of these cities,” she says.

In addition, the team's analysis found there will be more storms along the East Coast, and because they will be moving more slowly they will produce stronger wind and more water damage to homes and businesses. In fact, the longest-lived hurricanes will last twice as long as today's storms. “Norfolk saw the biggest impact in how long storms last, but all three cities see impacts that would lead one to think about how they are preparing for these events in the future,” Garner continues.

Hurricanes need warm water to survive, and most of them tend to die out once they cross the northern boundary of the [Gulf Stream](#), a wide, fast-moving ocean current that brings warm tropical water from the Gulf of Mexico past south Florida, along Cape Hatteras and North Carolina, and then across the Atlantic to Europe. Two recent hurricanes, Dorian in 2019 and Matthew in 2016, were so powerful that they actually slowed the current by 50 percent for several weeks, according to a paper published last year in the [Journal of Marine Systems](#).

That study's author, [Tal Ezer](#), a professor of earth and ocean sciences at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, believes that if future hurricanes also change their direction and speed, that may wreak even more havoc on the Gulf Stream. Ezer says the new study is a reasonable analysis of the possible future ocean system. “If these hurricanes can actually change tracks, that could have a significant impact on the Gulf Stream and ocean circulation,” he says. That's important because the Gulf Stream helps moderate temperatures in England and southern Europe, which would be much colder if it were to slow or stop.

In the US, coastlines were hit by 19 tropical storms that qualified as [billion-dollar disasters between the years 2010 and 2020](#), for a total of \$480 billion in damages, adjusted for inflation. Slow-moving storms will likely run up a bigger price tag, and that has some state and local officials worried. Norfolk and the surrounding Hampton Roads, Virginia area are home to the world's largest naval base, and rising sea levels have caused [daytime flooding](#) in many neighborhoods during the past 15 years.

“Flooding is creating problems for us now, so any big storm that comes along is going to be that much worse,” says Rear Admiral Ann Phillips, first special assistant to the governor of Virginia for coastal adaptation and protection. “More water on top of that is going to expand the floodplain.”

Phillips has been working with town and city officials in Virginia for the past year on planning for the future climate threat of coastal flooding, as well as bigger and more intense rainstorms. “We know that's coming. The challenge is how do we get ahead of it,” she says. “It's a slow, insidious threat, and it's going to keep getting worse.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	12/08 DOH: 787,245 cases, 9497 deaths
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/coronavirus/article256441916.html
GIST	The Washington state Department of Health reported 1,225 new COVID-19 cases and 37 deaths Wednesday. The data was incomplete, DOH said, due to a processing-system problem. As of Wednesday, statewide totals from the illness caused by the coronavirus are 787,245 cases and 9,497 deaths. The case total includes 95,279 infections listed as probable. Death data is considered complete only through Nov. 21. DOH revises previous case and death counts daily.
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	12/08 King Co. woman w/omicron 'mild illness'
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/king-county-covid-19-patient-infected-with-omicron-variant-has-mild-illness-had-not-traveled/
GIST	A King County woman who was the first in the county to be infected with the omicron variant of the coronavirus is experiencing a “mild illness,” the public health department said Wednesday.

The patient, a woman in her 20s who tested positive for the virus on Nov. 29, has not required hospitalization, Public Health — Seattle & King County said. She also hasn't traveled recently, suggesting the omicron variant has been spreading locally, though there's "no evidence of widespread exposure," the update said.

The health department has said the King County woman was fully vaccinated and received a booster shot recently, likely after exposure.

[Two other cases of omicron have been identified in the state](#) as of Wednesday — one in a Pierce County man in his 20s and one in a Thurston County man in his 30s. It's unclear if either had been vaccinated and further details about the severity of their illness haven't been released.

A spokesperson for Tacoma-Pierce County Public Health Department said Wednesday that updates aren't available for the Pierce County patient.

Thurston County's public health department has said it's not planning to release any more details about their patient, citing patient privacy laws.

"We are not able to release the vaccination status, hospitalization status, or medical disposition of this individual — it is all protected under HIPAA," Meredith Mathis, a spokesperson for Thurston County Public Health and Social Services, said in an email. "As a side note, a COVID-19 positive individual may choose whether or not to give us that information (including travel history, close contacts etc.) when we conduct contact tracing and disease investigation."

State health leaders have acknowledged that these three cases are likely not the only omicron infections in Washington, and are expecting more confirmed cases in the coming weeks as the variant spreads throughout several other states and countries.

Summarizing the little that's known so far about omicron, King County's public health officer Jeff Duchin said over the weekend that preliminary data suggests this variant may spread even more readily than the delta variant and is more likely to re-infect people who've had COVID.

On the other hand, he said, preliminary evidence also suggests there may be fewer severe cases.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	12/08 Pentagon: China preparing Taiwan attack
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2021/dec/8/pentagon-warns-china-preparing-military-campaign-t/
GIST	<p>China's military is actively preparing for a potential attack against Taiwan and the Pentagon is working closely with the island's military to deter a direct assault and develop asymmetric weapons to fight off Beijing, senior Biden administration officials told Congress on Wednesday.</p> <p>Ely Ratner, assistant defense secretary for Indo-Pacific security affairs, said Taiwan remains a "beacon of democracy" and is a vital outpost in a network of U.S. allies and partners in the western Pacific.</p> <p>Amid growing military coercion toward Taiwan, China is preparing "to unify Taiwan with the PRC by force while simultaneously attempting to deter, delay or deny third-party intervention on Taiwan's behalf," Mr. Ratner told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. The hearing was one of the first this year to explore the state of U.S. relations with Taiwan and was held at a time of increasing tensions between Washington and Beijing on a wide range of fronts.</p> <p>"The PRC is the [Defense] Department's pacing challenge, and a Taiwan contingency is the pacing scenario," said Mr. Ratner, using the acronym for People's Republic of China.</p>

Mr. Ratner said the Chinese military actions near Taiwan are “real and dangerous” and the arms buildup targeting the island is unlikely to end.

For now, however, the Pentagon believes China can be deterred from a direct assault through a combination of strengthened defenses, partnership with the United States and increased backing from like-minded democracies.

Still, recent signs have been worrisome. China’s rapid military buildup for a war on Taiwan includes sophisticated warships and submarines, advanced warplanes, increased numbers and quality of missiles, and cyberweapons.

“Without question, bolstering Taiwan’s self-defenses is an urgent task and an essential feature of deterrence,” Mr. Ratner said.

The China threat to Taiwan is not limited to an invasion or naval blockade, he added.

The People’s Liberation Army “is conducting a broader coercive campaign in the air and maritime domains around Taiwan,” Mr. Ratner said. “These operations are destabilizing, intentionally provocative, and increase the likelihood of miscalculation.”

Daniel J. Kritenbrink, assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs, told the Senate panel that the United States is expanding security cooperation and engagement with Taiwan as China seeks to undermine the fragile status quo across the 100-mile Taiwan Strait. Because Taiwan can never match China’s manpower and hardware advantage, the U.S. is pushing Taipei to develop strategies to make an invasion more difficult and costly.

The United States is “encouraging Taiwan to prioritize asymmetric capabilities that complicate PRC planning and to implement necessary defense reforms that will strengthen the resilience of Taiwan’s society against PRC coercion,” Mr. Kritenbrink said.

China’s military threats are bolstered by efforts to diminish Taiwan’s international ties through what Mr. Kritenbrink called “bullying” of countries that recognize or do business with the island democracy.

The threat from China is not limited to Taiwan, the administration officials said.

“We are deeply concerned about a range of destabilizing, aggressive and coercive action we have seen the People’s Republic of China carry out across the region and in some instances around the world,” Mr. Kritenbrink said. He noted stepped-up aggressiveness in regional seas, border disputes with India and “economic coercion” toward several countries.

Mr. Ratner and Mr. Kritenbrink did not explicitly say whether the United States would directly intervene in a conflict between China and Taiwan. They were observing a decades-old U.S. policy of “strategic ambiguity” on the Taiwan Strait standoff and Beijing’s sovereignty claims.

However, both officials’ comments on increased U.S. support, along with recent declarations by the governments of Japan and Australia to join a U.S. defense of Taiwan, were strong indications that American forces are prepared to back Taiwan in a mainland attack.

‘Dangerous divide’

Committee Chairman Sen. Robert Menendez, New Jersey Democrat, said China’s increasing threats shine a spotlight on the Taiwan Strait as “one of the most dangerous divides in the world today.”

The strait is among a handful of locations where a miscalculation could lead to war with potentially catastrophic consequences, he said.

Mr. Menendez singled out Chinese President Xi Jinping for fueling regional unease.

“Xi Jinping has orchestrated Beijing’s hypernationalist aggression for his own domestic ends as he imposes his authoritarian neo-Maoist vision on the Chinese people,” he said.

Mr. Ratner said the United States supports efforts by Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen to balance conventional military modernization with the asymmetric warfare tools.

Among the weapons the Pentagon wants Taiwan to build or purchase are coast defense cruise missiles, short- and medium-range air defenses, naval mines, and cutting-edge command, control and communications systems.

Other asymmetric weapons were not detailed, but they likely include missiles aimed at giving Taipei a military advantage.

An international agreement constrained Taiwan from building missiles with ranges over 300 miles.

It is building a land-attack cruise missile called the Hsiung Feng IIE with a range up to 1,200 miles — enough to strike targets inside China, including the major financial center of Shanghai.

In addition to weapons sales, the Pentagon is working more closely with the Taiwanese on doctrine and military reforms and better combat training.

“We think they are making real, tangible progress on this, and we’re going to do everything we can to support these efforts,” Mr. Ratner said. He added that the Pentagon is taking a proactive approach to back Taiwan.

In addition to deploying asymmetric weapons, the Taiwanese must invest in capabilities such as enhancing resilience against attacks, improving civilian-military integration and building a strategy that includes “defense-in-depth” — multiple layers of defenses.

Taiwan’s strategic location along a line of islands stretching from Japan through the South China Sea makes keeping the island a free and open democracy a policy imperative, U.S. officials say. Mr. Ratner called Taiwan “an anchor to a network of allies and partners in the region.”

Under questioning from Mr. Menendez, Mr. Krittenbrink said the State Department is considering a request from Taipei to upgrade its diplomatic status from the unofficial Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office to the Taiwan Representative Office.

The Biden administration is also reviewing a request from Taiwan for transfers of surplus U.S. military equipment, according to testimony during the hearing.

A Chinese Embassy spokesman did not respond to an email request for comment.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	12/08 US-led diplomatic boycott snowballs
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2021/dec/8/us-led-diplomatic-olympic-boycott-snowballs-top-we/
GIST	<p>The U.S.-led diplomatic boycott of the Beijing Winter Olympics snowballed Wednesday as Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom signed on, sending a message on human rights violations and drawing a frosty response from China.</p> <p>The Biden administration’s Monday decision was followed by announcements from top U.S. allies, including British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who said there would be “effectively a diplomatic boycott of the Winter Olympics in Beijing. No ministers are expected to attend and no officials.”</p>

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said at a press conference on Ottawa's Parliament Hill that "we are extremely concerned by the repeated human rights violations by the Chinese government."

"That is why we are announcing today that we will not be sending any diplomatic representation to the Beijing Olympic and Paralympic Games this winter," Mr. Trudeau said. "Our athletes have been training for years and are looking forward to compete at the highest level against athletes from around the world."

Hours earlier, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison confirmed that no dignitaries would join the Olympic delegation, prompting a Chinese official to retort that "no one would care about whether they come or not."

"We have reiterated many times that the Winter Olympic Games is not a stage for political posturing and manipulation," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said at a Wednesday press conference, as translated by the Xinhua News Agency.

"China hasn't invited any Australian government official to attend the Beijing Winter Olympics," he said. "In fact, no one would care whether they come or not, and Australian politicians' political stunt for selfish gains has no impact whatsoever on the Olympics."

That said, the absence of top Western dignitaries threatens to keep China's human rights record in the spotlight and take the shine off Beijing's image as host of the 2022 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games in February.

Lithuania announced last week that it would refuse to send a diplomatic delegation. New Zealand also plans to keep its government officials at home, although Deputy Prime Minister Grant Robertson said the decision was made in October based on the COVID-19 pandemic.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki announced Monday that no U.S. government officials would accompany the athletes. She cited Beijing's "ongoing genocide and crimes against humanity in Xinjiang and other human rights abuses."

"The athletes on Team USA have our full support. We will be behind them 100% as we cheer them on from home," she said. "We will not be contributing to the fanfare of the games."

President Biden has faced calls for months to pull out of what critics call the "genocide Olympics" based on the Chinese Communist Party's shaky human rights record.

Beijing has been accused of carrying out an intensified campaign of repression against Muslim Uyghurs in the Xinjiang region in western China and other minorities, putting them in reeducation camps. The Chinese government also has reportedly tried to limit the growth of the Uyghur population, destroyed mosques and shrines, and sent children to boarding schools for indoctrination. Britain's United Nations ambassador called the situation "one of the worst human rights crises of our time."

China also has cracked down on protests and civil liberties in Hong Kong and has come under fire for last month's apparent disappearance of Chinese tennis star Peng Shuai after she accused a top Communist Party official of sexual assault.

While the administration's decision disappointed those calling for a total boycott, even staunch Biden critics such as Sen. Ted Cruz, Texas Republican, said the move struck the right balance.

"I agree with the diplomatic boycott. It's something that I've called for for a long time," Mr. Cruz said on Hugh Hewitt's radio show. "I don't agree with what some people are calling for, which is a boycott of our athletes, which is stopping our athletes from going to the Olympics. I think that would be a mistake."

He cited President Carter's boycott of the 1980 Summer Olympics in Moscow over the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, which prompted the Soviet Union to retaliate by skipping the 1984 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles.

"I understand the sentiment behind it, but it was the same sentiment that led Jimmy Carter to do that in 1980, and I think it didn't work then," Mr. Cruz said. "I don't think it's fair to punish our athletes. I think there are young men and young women who have spent years, decades, practicing and getting ready for the Olympics. And I don't think it's fair to make them the victims."

Mr. Cruz said the Beijing Olympics should be used as an opportunity "to highlight the evil that they're perpetrating."

Disagreeing was Sen. Rick Scott, Florida Republican, who blasted Mr. Biden for ignoring pleas to support a relocation of the games from China.

"President Biden had the chance to actually stand up to Beijing's genocide and human rights abuses, but again, he has chosen appeasement and weakness over strength and resolve," Mr. Scott said in a Monday statement. "Time and time again, Biden does the bare minimum when it comes to dealing with China, and it's absolutely unacceptable."

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said Beijing would respond with "firm countermeasures" and warned that a diplomatic boycott could hurt relations with the U.S. on other matters.

"The U.S. should stop politicizing sports and stop disrupting and undermining the Beijing Winter Olympics, lest it should affect bilateral dialogue and cooperation in important areas and international and regional issues," Mr. Zhao said at a Monday press briefing.

Thomas Bach, president of the International Olympic Committee, said his focus was on the athletes at the games, which run Feb. 4-20. The Paralympic Games will follow from March 4-13.

"The IOC has always been concerned with the participation of the athletes in the Olympic Games," Mr. Bach said in a video news conference, as reported by Reuters. "We welcome the support for their Olympic teams [that] all these governments have been emphasizing."

Speculation swirled Wednesday about whether the snub would mushroom. Italy, which is slated to host the 2026 Winter Olympics, has reportedly decided not to join the boycott.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has reportedly accepted an invitation to appear at the games, which could make him the first state leader to meet with Chinese President Xi Jinping since the COVID-19 pandemic began.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	12/08 New Zealand bans young from smoking
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2021/dec/8/new-zealand-bans-young-people-ever-buying-cigarette/
GIST	<p>New Zealand will ban smoking outright over the next generation, according to a plan released Thursday.</p> <p>According to multiple media reports, the aim to make the country smoke-free will raise the legal smoking age every year, effectively making anyone currently under age 14 from ever being legally able to smoke.</p> <p>"This is a historic day for the health of our people," said Dr. Ayesha Verrall, the country's associate health minister.</p> <p>"We want to make sure young people never start smoking so we will make it an offense to sell or supply smoked tobacco products to new cohorts of youth," she said Thursday.</p>

The plan made public Thursday has other elements, all of which further one of the world's most draconian and longstanding anti-tobacco campaigns.

The plan isn't technically law yet, but the campaign, dubbed "Smokefree 2025" was a top priority of the Labor Party, which has an absolute majority in the Parliament. In parliamentary systems with tight party discipline, such as New Zealand's, passage of party-backed legislation is considered a formality.

The government will restrict the number of stores allowed to sell cigarettes, providing just 500 tobacco-sales licenses nationwide, with the number to decrease in the future. It also orders nicotine limits to make smoking less addictive.

"New laws will mean only smoked tobacco products containing very low-levels of nicotine can be sold, with a significant reduction in the number of shops who can sell them," Dr. Verrall said.

The retail regulations will not be implemented immediately, to give stores time to adjust, she said.

The target is to have 5% or less of the New Zealand population smoking by 2025.

"This action plan offers some hope of realizing our 2025 Smokefree goal," said Dr. Alistair Humphrey, chairman of the New Zealand Medical Association.

Though the current plan has no tax increases, the country's tobacco levy went up 10% every year between 2011 and 2020, to the point where a 20-pack of Marlboros, according to the Daily Mail Australia, costs \$33NZ, or to \$22.45 in American money.

This created a black market, the newspaper reported, and made stores selling tobacco into criminal targets.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	12/08 Omicron pushes remote work interest
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2021/dec/8/omicron-variant-increases-employee-interest-remote/
GIST	<p>A new survey shows that 64% of U.S. wage earners are "more interested in working remotely" due to the omicron variant of COVID-19.</p> <p>The Frontier Communications survey of 1,002 employed Americans, conducted on Amazon Mechanical Turk early this month, also found that 28% of respondents had not yet returned to the office and 20% said their employers had gone fully remote for the future.</p> <p>"The most desired work style was full-time in-person accounting for 44% of respondents; however 64% of respondents said that Omicron and other variants had made them more interested in working remotely," the survey reported.</p> <p>Of the employees surveyed, 56% said they currently are working in-person, compared to 16% hybrid and 28% fully remote.</p> <p>Among those who desire to work in person, 49% said they would quit their job if they could not be on-site for their jobs.</p> <p>An additional 54% of respondents said that their company was requiring a vaccine and 16% said their company was requiring vaccination and a booster.</p> <p>The survey's respondents included 138 part-time employees and 864 full-time workers. While 156 respondents were in hybrid work arrangements and 272 were fully remote, the remaining employees were working on-site. The survey's margin of error was plus or minus 3 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.</p>

	<p>The Importance of the Great Return survey, looking at the impact of Omicron on workplace habits, confirmed and updated a previous survey that Frontier ran in August.</p> <p>That first survey of 1,000 employees found that 45% said hybrid work would be the best way of enticing them back to the office.</p> <p>Less than half felt happy about returning to the office at that time, but managers were 14% more likely to be happy about it than standard employees.</p> <p>Respondents to the first survey also said their top fear of returning to the office was unvaccinated co-workers.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	12/09 Hong Kong convicts democracy activists
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/dec/09/jimmy-lai-among-three-hong-kong-democracy-activists-convicted-over-tiananmen-vigil
GIST	<p>Jailed Hong Kong media mogul Jimmy Lai was among three democracy campaigners convicted of taking part in a banned Tiananmen vigil as the prosecution of multiple activists came to a conclusion.</p> <p>Lai, the 74-year-old owner of the now-closed pro-democracy Apple Daily newspaper, was found guilty of unlawful assembly charges on Thursday alongside former journalist Gwyneth Ho and prominent rights lawyer Chow Hang-tung.</p> <p>Authorities charged more than two dozen pro-democracy politicians and activists over a vigil last year, which commemorated the victims of Beijing's deadly crackdown in 1989.</p> <p>The trio were the only ones to contest their charges in court, meaning they were the last to receive their verdict.</p> <p>Hong Kong's district court convicted them of charges including inciting and taking part in an unauthorised assembly.</p> <p>In practical terms, the convictions make minimal difference.</p> <p>Lai, Chow and Ho are among dozens of activists already behind bars facing separate prosecutions under a strict national security law that Beijing imposed on Hong Kong in the wake of huge and often violent democracy protests two years ago.</p> <p>But their prosecution is the latest illustration of how much the gap has narrowed between Hong Kong and the mainland, where authorities have long sought to scrub memories and official records of Tiananmen.</p> <p>For three decades, Hong Kong's annual 4 June candlelight vigil would attract tens of thousands of people, which - with its slogans for democracy and ending one-party rule in China - became a symbol for the political freedoms enjoyed in the city.</p> <p>But Hong Kong authorities have banned the last two vigils citing both the coronavirus pandemic and security fears.</p> <p>This year, Beijing made it clear it will no longer tolerate Tiananmen commemorations in Hong Kong or Macau, the only two places within China where public remembrance could take place.</p> <p>Multiple organisers of the annual vigil – including Chow – were charged with the national security crime of subversion while a 4 June museum they ran was closed by authorities and its exhibits carted away.</p>

	<p>Unlawful assembly prosecutions have been brought against activists who took part in both the 2020 and this year's banned Tiananmen vigils.</p> <p>Previously, 16 politicians and activists – including prominent campaigner Joshua Wong – were sentenced to six to 10 months in jail over their roles in the vigil, with a few granted suspended sentences.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	12/08 Data: 3 Pfizer doses protect from omicron
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/dec/08/omicron-can-partially-evade-covid-vaccine-protection-study-finds
GIST	<p>Three doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine are likely to protect against infection with the Omicron variant but two doses may not, according to laboratory data that will increase pressure to speed up booster programmes.</p> <p>Tests using antibodies in blood samples have given some of the first insights into how far Omicron escapes immunity, showing a stark drop-off in the predicted protection against infection or any type of disease for people who have had two doses. The findings suggest that, for Omicron, Pfizer/BioNTech should now be viewed as a “three-dose vaccine”.</p> <p>The vaccine makers said they would continue “at full speed” with plans to develop an updated Omicron-based vaccine by March 2022 if needed – and their working presumption is that it will be.</p> <p>Separate results, from preliminary studies by the German Centre for Infection Research, also found significant reductions in antibody potency for the Pfizer/BioNTech, Moderna and Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccines against Omicron.</p> <p>In the first official briefing from vaccine manufacturers on the likely efficacy of their shots against Omicron, Prof Ugur Sahin, the CEO and co-founder of BioNTech, said on Wednesday: “Individuals who have received two vaccines will most likely not have a significant prevention from infection or any type of disease. We know they will have memory T-cells, which may prevent severe disease.”</p> <p>He added that the strategy adopted by the UK and others to accelerate booster programmes was “the right way to go”, with an extra dose appearing to compensate for the vaccine being less well matched to Omicron than to earlier Covid strains.</p> <p>Vaccine makers now face the task of deciding whether a tweaked variant jab will be required and what form it should take. This will depend on real-world data on reinfection rates, transmissibility and how severe the Omicron variant is, which will emerge in the next two to six weeks.</p> <p>Sahin said his company was, for now, working on the development of an Omicron-specific vaccine, but a secondary option was a hybrid Omicron/Delta vaccine, which could be manufactured on a similar 100-day schedule.</p> <p>Pfizer's data, posted online on Tuesday, is among the first to be released about the ability of the immune system to combat Omicron and has not been peer-reviewed. The scientists tested blood from 19 people who had the Pfizer/BioNTech jab for its ability to neutralise the Omicron variant, and compared this with the response to an earlier form of coronavirus.</p> <p>The scientists found a 25-fold reduction in the blood's neutralisation against Omicron, but not complete immune escape. Blood from people who had received three doses had a roughly equivalent potency against Omicron as blood samples from those who had two doses pitted against the original Wuhan strain.</p> <p>The findings are broadly in line with a preliminary study from the Africa Health Research Institute in South Africa on Tuesday, which found a 41-fold reduction in the potency of antibodies after two doses of Pfizer against Omicron.</p>

“It is likely that lesser vaccine-induced protection against infection and disease would be the result,” said Prof Willem Hanekom, the executive director of the institute. “Importantly, most vaccinologists agree that the current vaccines will still protect against severe disease and death in the face of Omicron infection. It is therefore critical that everyone should be vaccinated.”

Scientists believe that T-cells, which work in parallel with antibodies, are likely to hold up better against Omicron, including protecting against severe disease.

Daniel Altmann, a professor of immunology at Imperial College London, said the study offered a clear message. “Those who are unvaccinated, or even two-dose vaccinated, are likely to be highly vulnerable to infection,” he said. “However, those who’ve seen a spike three times, either by boosting or by infection plus two doses, appear generally in the safety zone ... So [there is] an even stronger argument for getting boosters as widely and rapidly as possible.”

Some responded with relief to the initial findings, indicating that things could have been worse. Prof Jonathan Ball, a professor of molecular virology at the University of Nottingham, said that while the dataset was small, it was reassuring. “We need to understand whether these increased virus-killing antibody levels after boost plays out for all age groups, but these early signs are good,” he said.

Speaking on Wednesday, the World Health Organization’s director general, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, said its advisory group on vaccines was also investigating whether changes to current vaccines were needed. There was now a consistent picture of rapid increase in transmission due to the Omicron variant, though the exact rate remained difficult to quantify, he said.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	12/09 New Zealand: China growing challenge
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/dec/09/new-zealand-faces-growing-challenge-from-chinese-nationalism-defence-report-warns
GIST	<p>New Zealand faces “a substantially more challenging and complex strategic environment”, in large part because of China’s rise and “increasingly strong nationalist narrative”, according to a stark report released by the country’s defence ministry.</p> <p>The remarkably explicit warning on Wednesday included a detailed discussion of China’s military modernisation and emphasised the importance of New Zealand’s deep security relationships with Anglosphere countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, Canada and Australia.</p> <p>“It paints a pretty sobering picture of changes in New Zealand’s strategic environment,” says Professor David Capie, director of Victoria University of Wellington’s Centre for Strategic Studies. “It argues the South Pacific is no longer a benign backwater, but rather that some of the challenges we’ve seen playing out in the wider Indo-Pacific are now coming closer to home.”</p> <p>The report comes as New Zealand plunges into a fraught debate over how to manage strategic competition between America and China in its Pacific backyard. Many officials and observers in Wellington have taken a more hawkish view of China in recent years and pushed for a closer security partnership with America.</p> <p>The ministry’s report seems designed to influence that discussion. Some will see it as pushback to the foreign minister, Nanaia Mahuta, who earlier this year expressed discomfort with expanding the remit of the Anglosphere’s Five Eyes partnership beyond intelligence-gathering.</p> <p>The report noted that “the defence aspect [of Five Eyes] is as long-standing and as fundamental as the intelligence aspect”. It strongly endorsed New Zealand’s continued involvement in the partnership, saying the country “derives enormous benefit from this partnership, including in terms of access to</p>

	<p>defence capabilities, information technologies and military developments that would otherwise be unachievable”.</p> <p>Strategic competition between America and China was singled out as a “major driver” of increased insecurity. The ministry characterised the Indo-Pacific as the “central global theatre for strategic competition”. It warned an external power – almost certainly China – could establish a military base or use paramilitary forces in the region, and implicitly cautioned American policymakers that delivery on President Joe Biden’s “renewed commitment” to the Indo-Pacific “will be important in determining the future for this region”.</p> <p>Another driver of the increased security threats which New Zealand now faces, per the ministry, is intensified climate change. It noted that climate change’s impacts are already present and include extreme fires, intense cyclones and prolonged droughts. These will drive greater social and political instability. “More frequent disasters means reduced recovery time between events, and more intense disasters means more damage from which to recover.”</p> <p>“After decades of deployments to Afghanistan and the Middle East, [the report] makes clear that the South Pacific is where New Zealand needs to focus its primary defence efforts in the future,” says Capie. It remains to be seen whether that will prompt a change in New Zealand foreign policy going forward. “The government has set out a very worrying picture of New Zealand’s strategic environment, but is it willing to spend any more or do anything different from what it has in the past?”</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	12/08 Beijing reigns in China’s central bank
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/beijing-reins-in-chinas-central-bank-11638981078?mod=hp_lead_pos2
GIST	<p>The People’s Bank of China has never been politically independent like a Western central bank, but it has nonetheless enjoyed a special status in the nation’s economic hierarchy. Now, President Xi Jinping’s shake-up of China’s financial sector is stripping that away.</p> <p>Earlier this week, pressured by senior leaders worried about plunging economic growth, the PBOC said it would ease banks’ reserve requirements, effectively making more cash available for bank lending. The move went against policy signals it had sent weeks earlier and came as the central bank and other financial institutions came under scrutiny by Beijing, part of Mr. Xi’s effort to curb capitalist forces in the economy.</p> <p>Of all the financial institutions being scrutinized by Mr. Xi’s discipline inspectors, the PBOC is arguably the most consequential. The central bank oversees one of the world’s largest financial systems. Though it needs approval from the top bodies of government before it makes big decisions such as those about interest rates, the PBOC has worked for years to establish credibility among investors, at home and abroad, as China’s markets became more sophisticated and their influence extended across the globe.</p> <p>In recent weeks, Communist Party discipline inspectors from China’s top anticorruption agency have visited the central bank’s headquarters in central Beijing. Officials briefed on the matter said the inspectors asked questions, reviewed documents and brought an unusually stern message: Beijing has little tolerance for any talk of central-bank independence; the monetary authority, just like any other part of the government, answers to the party.</p> <p>The PBOC is among some 25 financial institutions at the heart of the Chinese economy now being scrutinized by Mr. Xi’s discipline inspectors. The examinations started earlier this fall as Beijing was trying to address what top leaders see as lax regulations over sectors ranging from technology to entertainment and education and to reduce the economy’s overreliance on debt-fueled property investments.</p> <p>People familiar with the plan have said part of the focus of the inspections was on whether these state financial stalwarts had become too chummy with private firms, or, in the case of regulators like the PBOC, whether they had been negligent in fending off risks posed by private companies such as Ant Group, the</p>

beleaguered financial-technology firm controlled by tech billionaire Jack Ma, and [China Evergrande Group](#), [the debt-laden real-estate developer](#) now teetering on the brink of collapse.

The [crackdown on property lending](#) was welcomed by the central bank, which has long advocated what PBOC officials have called “policy discipline” and has been of the view that credit easing only exacerbates speculative bubbles.

Even as markets swayed over the threat of default by Evergrande and other developers who were now unable to get new loans, Sun Guofeng, head of the central bank’s monetary-policy department, in October sought to dispel expectations that the PBOC would slash banks’ reserve requirements to make it easier for them to issue loans.

“From the perspective of the entire fourth quarter, the situation of liquidity supply and demand should be basically balanced,” Mr. Sun said at an Oct. 15 press conference, implying that there was no need for the central bank to resort to a large-scale liquidity injection.

Economists and investors paid heed. Nomura analysts said in an Oct. 17 note to investors that they didn’t expect a reduction in reserve-requirement ratios in the fourth quarter.

In the weeks since, China’s leadership has come under pressure to tamp down turmoil in the property sector, which is [now threatening to severely cut into services and manufacturing activities](#). A senior economic adviser to Chinese leaders said China’s [much slower-than-expected economic expansion](#) in the third quarter, at 4.9%, led top leaders to decide to bolster support for the economy despite the central bank’s preference to maintain a more conservative policy stance.

On Friday, Premier Li Keqiang all but overturned the guidance provided by the PBOC earlier, pledging to cut the reserve-requirement ratio to buttress the economy in a video call with the International Monetary Fund Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva. Footage by China’s state broadcaster shows the PBOC governor, Yi Gang, sitting in the background, diligently taking notes.

Three days later, the central bank announced the cut. For all its talk of policy discipline, the PBOC might find it having to ease further to support the economy, and some economists are expecting interest-rate cuts next year.

Over the 15 years that the PBOC was led by Zhou Xiaochuan, one of China’s best-known economic reformers and a believer in making the central bank both more transparent and more autonomous in setting policies, the PBOC became such a dominant force in China’s economic governance that it was often dubbed by the Chinese public as “yang ma,” or Big Mama.

With a combination of political savvy and technical expertise, Mr. Zhou managed to put off his retirement for five years and spent his last years in office promoting wider use overseas of the Chinese yuan, also known as the renminbi, an effort that earned him the nickname “Mr. Renminbi” within China.

During his tenure, Mr. Zhou, who retired in 2018, worked with Liu He, another official known to be market-friendly who now serves as the vice premier overseeing the financial sector. Together, the two of them elevated the central bank’s status in the Chinese bureaucracy, enabling it to resist calls from other parts of the government to turn on the credit floodgate whenever growth came under pressure.

“The PBOC has carved out a modest amount of operational autonomy to push forward financial liberalization and a more market-oriented monetary policy framework,” said Eswar Prasad, an economics professor at Cornell University and former China head for the International Monetary Fund.

“That notion of operational autonomy is now coming into conflict with a more intrusive role of the government in the economy,” Mr. Prasad said, adding: “The PBOC is losing.”

The discipline inspectors have already fingered for investigation a former senior central-bank official in charge of financial stability, Zhou Xuedong, according to people with knowledge of the matter, as well as another former official involved in PBOC's supervision of financial-technology firms, Wang Yonghong.

It couldn't be determined what Mr. Zhou, currently executive vice president at state financier China Development Bank, and Mr. Wang are being investigated for. They couldn't be reached to comment. The PBOC, China Development Bank and the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection didn't respond to questions.

The U.S. Federal Reserve, the European Central Bank, Bank of England and others have focused in recent years on tailoring their signals on interest rates and other big decisions to markets, building up their credibility with investors.

In the U.S., the Fed has also come under political pressure to lower interest rates, especially during the Trump administration, but took pains to assert its independence.

The Chinese central bank has tried to act like its Western peers by being more responsive to investors and improving its communication with the market. Erosion of the central bank's authority threatens to make its messages less meaningful to investors and economists.

In an article posted on the discipline commission's website last month, Xu Jia'ai, head inspector of the PBOC, said his team of inspectors had given party lectures across the central bank to strengthen the party's leadership at the bank.

"In the past period, the foundation for comprehensive and strict governance of the party in the financial sector was weak," Mr. Xu said, "and the tendency of financial 'specialism' and the central bank 'exceptionalism' was prominent."

The message, said some who attended the lectures, was that whatever macro-policy discipline the central bank tries to maintain would be secondary to the need to deliver what the party leadership asks.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	12/08 Scientists: coronavirus attacks fat tissue
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/08/health/covid-fat-obesity.html
GIST	<p>From the start of the pandemic, the coronavirus seemed to target people carrying extra pounds. Patients who were overweight or obese were more likely to develop severe Covid-19 and more likely to die.</p> <p>Though these patients often have health conditions like diabetes that compound their risk, scientists have become increasingly convinced that their vulnerability has something to do with obesity itself.</p> <p>Now researchers have found that the coronavirus infects both fat cells and certain immune cells within body fat, prompting a damaging defensive response in the body.</p> <p>"The bottom line is, 'Oh my god, indeed, the virus can infect fat cells directly,'" said Dr. Philipp Scherer, a scientist who studies fat cells at UT Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas, who was not involved in the research.</p> <p>"Whatever happens in fat doesn't stay in fat," he added. "It affects the neighboring tissues as well."</p> <p>The research has not yet been peer-reviewed or published in a scientific journal, but it was posted online in October. If the findings hold up, they may shed light not just on why patients with excess pounds are vulnerable to the virus, but also on why certain younger adults with no other risks become so ill.</p> <p>The study's authors suggested the evidence could point to new Covid treatments that target body fat.</p>

“Maybe that’s the Achilles’ heel that the virus utilizes to evade our protective immune responses — by hiding in this place,” Dr. Vishwa Deep Dixit, a professor of comparative medicine and immunology at Yale School of Medicine, said.

The finding is particularly relevant to the United States, which has one of the highest rates of obesity in the world. Most American adults are overweight, and 42 percent have obesity. Black, Hispanic, Native American and Alaska Native people in the U.S. have higher obesity rates than white adults and Asian Americans; they have also been disproportionately affected by the pandemic, with death rates roughly double those of white Americans.

“This could well be contributing to severe disease,” Dr. Catherine Blish, a professor at Stanford University Medical Center and one of the report’s two senior authors, said. “We’re seeing the same inflammatory cytokines that I see in the blood of the really sick patients being produced in response to infection of those tissues.”

Body fat used to be thought of as inert, a form of storage. But scientists now know that the tissue is biologically active, producing hormones and immune-system proteins that act on other cells, promoting a state of nagging low-grade inflammation even when there is no infection.

Inflammation is the body’s response to an invader, and sometimes it can be so vigorous that it is more harmful than the infection that triggered it.

Fat tissue is composed mostly of fat cells, or adipocytes. It also contains pre-adipocytes, which mature into fat cells, and a variety of immune cells, including a type called adipose tissue macrophages.

Dr. Blish, with colleagues at Stanford and in Germany and Switzerland, carried out experiments to see if fat tissue obtained from bariatric surgery patients could become infected with the coronavirus, and tracked how various types of cells responded.

The fat cells themselves could become infected, the scientists found, yet did not become very inflamed. But certain immune cells called macrophages also could be infected, and they developed a robust inflammatory response.

Even stranger, the pre-adipocytes were not infected, but contributed to the inflammatory response. (The scientists did not examine whether particular variants were more destructive in this regard than others.)

The research team also obtained fat tissue from the bodies of European patients who had died of Covid and discovered the coronavirus in fat near various organs.

The idea that adipose tissue might serve as a reservoir for pathogens is not new, Dr. Dixit said. Body fat is known to harbor a number of them, including H.I.V. and the influenza virus.

The coronavirus appears to be able to evade the body fat’s immune defenses, which are limited and incapable of fighting it effectively. And in people who are obese, there can be a lot of body fat.

A man whose ideal weight is 170 pounds but who weighs 250 pounds is carrying a substantial amount of fat in which the virus may “hang out,” replicate and trigger a destructive immune system response, said Dr. David Kass, a professor of cardiology at Johns Hopkins.

“If you really are very obese, fat is the biggest single organ in your body,” Dr. Kass said.

The coronavirus “can infect that tissue and actually reside there,” he said. “Whether it hurts it, kills it or at best, it’s a place to amplify itself — it doesn’t matter. It becomes kind of a reservoir.”

As the inflammatory response snowballs, cytokines trigger even more inflammation and the release of additional cytokines. “It’s like a perfect storm,” he said.

Dr. Blish and her colleagues speculated that infected body fat may even contribute to “long Covid,” a condition describing troublesome symptoms like fatigue that persist for weeks or months after recovery from an acute episode.

The data also suggest that Covid vaccines and treatments may need to take into account the patient’s weight and fat stores.

“This paper is another wake-up call for the medical profession and public health to look more deeply into the issues of overweight and obese individuals, and the treatments and vaccines we’re giving them,” said Barry Popkin, a professor of nutrition at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, who has studied the heightened risk that Covid poses to those with obesity.

“We keep documenting the risk they have, but we still aren’t addressing it,” Dr. Popkin said.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	12/08 Covid deaths rise: prolonged grief disorder
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/08/well/mind/prolonged-grief-disorder-covid.html
GIST	<p>A year after her mother died from Covid, Fiana Garza Tulip held a small memorial service on a Texas beach that her family had visited countless times when she was a child. As she and her brother dropped a wreath of yellow roses into the waves, she expected to cry. But the tears did not come. She felt only guilt for appearing to be unmoved, heartless even.</p> <p>Ms. Garza Tulip, 41, had endured so many losses — two miscarriages, and the virus taking her mother, uncle and great-aunt. It also debilitated her father. “I think the one thing I miss the most is feeling anything,” she said recently of life after the series of tragedies.</p> <p>She had thought the lack of emotion meant she was not grieving, unaware that numbness can be a symptom of grief. When a therapist diagnosed her with prolonged grief disorder, or P.G.D., a newly recognized condition, Ms. Garza Tulip, who lives in New Jersey, was relieved that what she suffered had a name. Recently added to the upcoming revision of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, or D.S.M., it’s a syndrome in which people feel stuck in an endless cycle of mourning that can last for years or even decades, severely impairing their daily life, relationships and job performance.</p> <p>“This is about a lost relationship that was central to who you are,” said Holly Prigerson, co-director of the Center for Research on End-of-Life Care at Weill Cornell Medicine and a longtime researcher into grief. “Now this person is gone, it’s ‘I don’t know who I am anymore.’”</p> <p>Symptoms of P.G.D. can include emotional numbness; intense loneliness; avoidance of reminders the person is not there; feeling that life is meaningless; difficulty with reintegration into life; extreme emotional pain, sorrow or anger; a sense of disbelief about the death; and a feeling that a part of oneself has died.</p> <p>In the immediate aftermath, or “acute” phase of a death, such feelings are considered normal. But when three or more of these symptoms persist nearly every day for a year after the loss in adults, or for six months in children and adolescents, grief counselors say it can be a worrisome sign of prolonged grief disorder.</p> <p>The disorder, which was previously known as complicated grief and persistent complex bereavement disorder, isn’t new. But before it was listed in the D.S.M. as a condition for further study. Preliminary studies suggest that it affects around 7 percent of those in mourning, though estimates vary. With the coronavirus claiming nearly 800,000 lives so far in the United States alone, grief counselors are concerned about the ongoing fallout. Each Covid death is projected to leave a ring of nine bereaved: That’s roughly seven million grieving parents, children, siblings, grandparents and spouses. And the losses cast a shadow over many more.</p>

Dr. Vivian Pender, president of the American Psychiatric Association, which publishes the D.S.M., said the prevalence of prolonged grief disorder may increase because of the sheer magnitude of Covid deaths. It is not yet clear whether having a loved one die from Covid will increase one's risk of developing P.G.D. Still, Dr. Pender said: "I think the pandemic has made losing someone particularly worse. The usual loss and grieving process has been disrupted."

'There's No Playbook' for Grieving

Wherever Lia Catanzaro goes, she can't escape the reminders of the disease that took away her father, Paul, in June 2020: the masks, the spaced out restaurant tables, the heated vaccine debates. She has a physical response to it all: her chest tightens, she starts to freeze and she has to remind herself to breathe. The 35-year-old social media manager from Cranston, R.I., left her job and deactivated her social media accounts, and has been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder and complicated grief.

"There's the number of how many people who have been lost to Covid, but not a lot of focus on how hellish it is in the aftermath," she said. "There's no playbook, no advice from other generations."

Like so many others, Ms. Catanzaro and Ms. Garza Tulip couldn't be with their parents in their last moments. Grief counselors say that Covid deaths may be as traumatic as losing someone suddenly and violently, like to a suicide, murder or fatal car crash. "They can't get to that person as they are dying; they can't hold that person," said Dr. Ted Rynearson, clinical professor of psychiatry at the University of Washington and medical director of grief services at [Virginia Mason Franciscan Health](#). "They are often left with an unfinished story."

Having to grieve without the support of others can add to the pain, Dr. Prigerson said. She knows this personally. Her mother died after battling Covid, too. It wasn't until eight months later that she could finally hold a memorial service with family, with guitar playing and singing and swaying. After that, she was able to sleep better at night.

Prolonged grief disorder is associated with a greater risk for sleep disorders, depression, drug and alcohol abuse, hospitalization and suicide attempts. But experts say some interventions may help to lower the risk of developing P.G.D. symptoms.

Robert A. Neimeyer, director of the [Portland Institute for Loss and Transition](#) and editor of the journal *Death Studies*, believes there are conscious actions people can take before suffering a loss that may help to mitigate the grieving process. They include not waiting to tell loved ones how much they mean to you, working to resolve conflicts with family members before serious illness or death, and cultivating a broad circle of support who can draw close when losses occur. "None of these will prevent grief, but they can help us integrate and bear with inevitable losses with greater strength, support and wisdom," he said.

[Research released this summer](#) suggests that if social workers can help caregivers acknowledge and prepare for their loved one's impending death, that could help stave off P.G.D. symptoms and other complications of bereavement. Reframing negative thoughts after a loss may help, too, Dr. Prigerson said, such as shifting from a belief that "No one will ever know/love/appreciate me like the deceased person," to "Others may know/love/appreciate me in different ways." Equally important is doing things to enhance a sense of well-being and inner calm, as well as practicing self-care — such as exercise, healthful eating and regular sleep.

In the wake of a death, many people are surprised by the ferocity of grief, and worry that they aren't grieving the right way. "This is one of those things, paradoxically, that can make grief last longer," wrote Dr. Katherine Shear, professor of psychiatry and founding director of the Center for Prolonged Grief at the Columbia School of Social Work, in an email. "So, it's important to accept grief, with its intense emotional pain, and understanding that there is no right way — and also no wrong way — to grieve."

Confronting a 'Lack of Grief Education'

Designating prolonged grief as a new mental disorder isn't something that has universal support. Some experts worry that pathologizing grief could lead people to seek treatment needlessly when their symptoms may recede naturally over time. Tashel Bordere, an assistant professor in the department of human development and family science at the University of Missouri, Columbia, who specializes in bereavement, said that the designation of grief as a "mental disorder" could also further stigmatize orphaned Black children, who are among the hardest hit by the pandemic. "The language makes me cringe," Dr. Bordere said. "I think what we have is a prolonged lack of grief education."

More than 140,000 children in the United States are estimated to have lost a primary or secondary caregiver to Covid, according to a new modeling [study](#) by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other institutions. Of those who lost a primary caregiver, about 65 percent are racial and ethnic minorities. There is less access to resources for these children, Dr. Bordere said, and school personnel often don't know how to recognize the signs of a grieving child, who may appear fatigued, distracted, irritable or argumentative.

Gwendell Garrett, 47, has wondered whether her 13-year-old son, Sterling, should get counseling. He seems fine, but was very close to his father, Omar, who died from Covid in March of 2020 at age 42. She thought talking with someone might help her son cope and help prevent any future issues. But when Ms. Garrett asked a school counselor about services for her son, she never heard back. She worries about her 7-year-old daughter, Gianna, too, who keeps dreaming about her daddy.

"It's hard with kids, they process things differently. They seem like happy children, but I can put that face on, too," said Ms. Garrett, an elementary school teacher who lives in Slidell, La., and is also struggling after the loss of her husband. She had recently spoken with one of Sterling's teachers, who was unaware of Omar's death. "The school system has no clue who in their system — their employees, their children — has lost someone in their family to this virus. There's nothing going on, no, 'Hey, has your family been affected?'"

What Therapeutic Help Looks Like

The Center for Prolonged Grief at Columbia has a [list of therapists](#) trained in its 16-session intervention therapy to identify and address prolonged grief; while Weill Cornell Medicine's Center for Research on End-of-Life Care has free [online resources](#), including a grief assessment tool, and [exercises](#) on cognitive reframing, coping and socializing.

Because P.G.D. is a new diagnosis, doctors can misidentify the condition as depression. Being able to recognize it, Dr. Shear said, is important since the treatments are different. Medication that helps depression doesn't help grief symptoms, like the persistent, pervasive yearning for the deceased; and, she said, neither does therapy that focuses on depression. She hopes the new D.S.M. designation will raise public awareness so that those who need help can get it.

After Ms. Garza Tulip began treatment for the disorder, she was sitting in her kitchen with her husband one night, talking about her mother, Isabelle. Pregnant and nearing her due date, she realized her mother wasn't going to be there for the birth. Then she began to sob, and sob and sob.

"It was like a faucet had opened," she said. Yet amid her grief, she felt the kicks of the long-forgotten, too: hope for the future. Just after Thanksgiving, her baby boy, Albie, came into the world. She believes her mom is shining through him. "He was the rainbow we needed," she said.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	12/08 NATO's long dilemma over Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/08/world/europe/nato-ukraine-russia-dilemma.html
GIST	BRUSSELS — Ukraine presents NATO with a dilemma many years in the making — one the alliance, itself, helped create.

In 2008, NATO — an American-led alliance explicitly created to counter the Soviet Union — promised membership to two former Soviet republics, Ukraine and Georgia, but without specifying when or how.

Russia saw the offer as a potential threat on its borders and an encroachment into the heart of its sphere of influence, the most serious in a series of affronts and humiliations by the West since the fall of the Soviet Union. From the outset, some NATO nations questioned whether the offer of membership was a wise move, and it is not clear that the promise will ever be kept, but predictably, it has fed a lasting conflict with President Vladimir V. Putin.

With Ukraine a NATO partner but not a member, it does not benefit from NATO's core principle, the commitment to collective defense, though Ukraine has sent troops to fight in NATO missions in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

So, as thousands of Russian troops mass on Ukraine's borders, NATO is not bound by treaty to protect Ukraine militarily, nor is it likely to try. Asked on Wednesday about the possibility of dispatching U.S. forces to Ukraine, President Biden flatly ruled it out, telling reporters at the White House, "That is not on the table."

But NATO does have a compelling interest in trying both to deter Russia and to avoid provoking an invasion.

"It is important to distinguish between NATO allies and partner Ukraine," Jens Stoltenberg, the NATO secretary-general, said last week. "NATO allies, there we provide collective defense guarantees," while "Ukraine is a partner, a highly valued partner."

But what does NATO owe such a highly valued partner?

"The question that NATO faces at its core is how it maintains the credibility of the alliance," said Ivo Daalder, a former U.S. ambassador to NATO and president of the Chicago Council on Global Affairs. For all its closeness to NATO, he said, Ukraine is not a member, so "how do you still guarantee its independence and sovereignty?"

Marta Dassu, a former Italian deputy foreign minister and adviser on Europe to the Aspen Institute, said, "You can't explicitly accept Putin's proposal to rule out membership in NATO, so in the end you try to build up Ukraine's military deterrence but can resort only to more economic sanctions, and that's probably not enough."

The Biden administration has sounded alarms recently about a possible Russian invasion of and has warned Moscow that serious economic penalties would follow. Mr. Biden said he had made that clear to Mr. Putin in a two-hour video conference the two leaders held on Tuesday.

"If, in fact, he invades Ukraine, there will be severe consequences — severe consequences — and economic consequences like none he's ever seen or ever have been seen," Mr. Biden said.

After the meeting, Mr. Putin repeated his contention that NATO expansion to Ukraine would pose a grave threat to Russia, and that "it would be criminal negligence on our part" not to seek to stop it.

"Russia carries out a peace-loving foreign policy, but it has the right to assure its own security," Mr. Putin said at a news conference in Sochi. "We assume that this time, at least, our concerns will be heard."

He spoke about discussion, not invasion. Russia would present proposals to Washington about a security dialogue in the next week, he said, adding: "We have the chance to continue this dialogue. I believe that this is the most important thing."

Over the past generation, a dozen countries that were once part of the Soviet bloc have joined NATO, moving its boundaries hundreds of miles eastward — expansions that Moscow has taken as aggressive moves by a potential enemy.

Given the promise of membership, Mr. Putin sees “encirclement” and a still-expansionist NATO that is committed to ripping Ukraine away from the Russian zone of influence. That is a particularly difficult blow for a man who saw the breakup of the Soviet Union as “the greatest geopolitical catastrophe” of the last century, and has focused on rebuilding and reasserting Russian power.

Mr. Putin regards Ukraine, where the medieval Russian state was born, as a fake country and an “inalienable part of Russia.” He laid out his views in a long essay in July, “On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians.”

Rightly or wrongly, he “increasingly views Ukraine as a Western aircraft carrier parked just across from Rostov Oblast in southern Russia,” wrote Eugene Rumer and Andrew S. Weiss of the Carnegie Endowment, noting that Ukraine is now one of the largest recipients of American military aid.

So far, Mr. Putin’s attempts to restore Russian control over Ukraine have backfired. In 2014, after a Ukrainian revolt that caused its pro-Russian president, Viktor F. Yanukovich, to flee, Mr. Putin invaded and annexed Crimea and aided a separatist war in eastern Ukraine that continues to this day.

“Putin is not being provoked by NATO, he’s provoked by the independence of Ukraine,” Mr. Daalder said. “But he’s made it less likely that Ukraine will ever do what he wants because of his actions. Ukraine is more pro-Western and more Ukrainian, and less Russian, as a result of what Putin did in 2014.”

In Ukraine’s 2019 elections, pro-Russian candidates were crushed. Mr. Putin runs the risk that invading Ukraine, rather than producing the submissive neighbor he wants, would, as many believe, simply reinforce Ukraine’s desire to remain independent.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, some in the West suggested NATO disband as well. Instead, it expanded, and once it began, “it was hard to know when to stop,” said Lawrence Freedman, emeritus professor of war studies at King’s College London and author of “Ukraine and the Art of Strategy.” Of course, he noted, the expansion was in response to the desires of the countries of the former Soviet bloc.

It would have been better, Mr. Freedman suggested, if NATO had “found other ways to support Georgia and Ukraine” and not promised membership. Most likely Ukraine will never be integrated into NATO, he said, “but we can’t put that into a treaty,” as Mr. Putin demands.

Still, it may be easier to grant Mr. Putin the discussion he says he wants on the future of European security if it eases Russian fears, Mr. Freedman said. “Fine, let’s have a big conference, it could go on for years. Talking to Putin is not a concession.”

But NATO’s “cardinal sin,” as Mr. Daalder put it, was the undefined promise made to Ukraine and Georgia in Bucharest in April 2008, the result of a late-night compromise reached by former President George W. Bush when other NATO members, like Germany and France, rejected his proposal to offer the two countries a concrete and immediate road map to membership.

“The Bucharest compromise was the worst of both worlds,” said Carl Bildt, the former Swedish prime minister and foreign minister. “It created expectations that were not fulfilled and fears that are grossly exaggerated. It was short-term expediency with long-term consequences that we have seen since then” — in Georgia, which lost a quick and nasty war to Russia four months later in 2008, and in the Russian effort to destabilize and even reassert control over Ukraine.

Fiona Hill, a Russian expert at the Brookings Institution, was at the Bucharest summit as an American national intelligence officer. She said the intelligence community recommended against offering a

	<p>membership path to Ukraine and Georgia, because much of NATO opposed it, but it was overridden by Mr. Bush.</p> <p>The compromise was brokered by the British, she said, but “it was the worst of all possible outcomes.” Mr. Putin, she said, “has been trying to shut that door ever since.”</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	12/08 US economic threat on Russia: limited tool?
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/08/business/economy/us-russia-sanctions-ukraine.html
GIST	<p>LONDON — When Russian soldiers crossed into Ukraine and seized Crimea in 2014, the Obama administration responded with a slate of economic penalties that ultimately imposed sanctions on hundreds of Russian officials and businesses and restricted investments and trade in the nation’s crucial finance, oil and military sectors.</p> <p>Now, with Russian troops massing on Ukraine’s border, the White House national security adviser has declared that President Biden looked Russia’s president, Vladimir V. Putin, in the eye this week “and told him things we didn’t do in 2014 we are prepared to do now.”</p> <p>Whether harsher measures would persuade Russia to stay out of Ukraine, however, is far from clear. Historically, economic sanctions have a decidedly mixed track record, with more failures than successes. And actions that would take the biggest bite out of the Russian economy — like trying to severely curb oil exports — would also be hard on America’s allies in Europe.</p> <p>“We’ve seen that over and over again, that sanctions have a hard time really coercing changes in major policies,” said Jeffrey Schott, a senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics who has spent decades researching the topic. “It’s a limited toolbox.”</p> <p>The best chances of success are when one country has significant economic leverage over the other and the policy goal is limited, Mr. Schott said — yet neither of those conditions really applies in this case. Mr. Putin has made clear that he considers Russia’s actions in Ukraine a matter of national security. And outside of the oil industry, Russia’s international trade and investments are limited, especially in the United States.</p> <p>With direct military intervention essentially off the table, Biden administration officials have listed a series of options that include financially punishing Mr. Putin’s closest friends and supporters, blocking the conversion of rubles into dollars, and pressuring Germany to block a new gas pipeline between Russia and Northern Europe from opening.</p> <p>Work on that pipeline — called Nord Stream 2 — has been completed, but it is waiting for approval from Germany’s energy regulator before it can begin operating.</p> <p>Any request from Washington would coincide with a leadership change in Berlin. The new chancellor, Olaf Scholz, and his cabinet were sworn into office on Wednesday. He has not yet made any definitive statements on the pipeline. Gas reserves are unusually low in Europe now, however, and there are worries about shortages and soaring prices as winter approaches.</p> <p>Russia supplies more than a third of Europe’s gas through the existing Nord Stream pipeline and has already been accused of withholding supplies as a way of pressuring Germany to approve Nord Stream 2.</p> <p>Washington could impose much more sweeping sanctions on particular companies and banks in Russia that would more severely curtail investment and production in the energy sector. The risk of tough sanctions on a company like Gazprom, which supplies natural gas, is that Russia could retaliate by cutting its deliveries to Europe.</p> <p>“That would hurt Russia a lot but also hurt Europe,” Mr. Schott said.</p>

In terms of ratcheting up the pressure, James Nixey, the director of the Russia-Eurasia program at the Chatham House think tank, suggested that financially squeezing the oligarchs who help Mr. Putin maintain power could be one way of bringing more targeted pressure.

“I would place a great premium on going after the inner and outer circle around Putin, which have connections back to the regime,” he said.

At the moment, the swirl of ambiguity about possible United States actions is useful, he added: “It’s quite good if the Russians are kept guessing.”

Russia, the United States and the European Union — which on Wednesday proposed expanding its power to use economic sanctions — are all playing something of a guessing game in order to pursue their policy goals. Russia is deploying troops on the border and at the same time is insisting on a guarantee that Ukraine won’t join NATO, while the West is warning there will be painful economic consequences if an invasion occurs.

One of the most extreme measures would be to cut off Russia from the system of international payments known as SWIFT that moves money around the world, as was done to Iran.

In 2019, the Russian prime minister at the time, Dmitri A. Medvedev, labeled such a threat as tantamount to [“a declaration of war.”](#)

Maria Shagina [argued in a report for the Carnegie Moscow Center](#) that such a move would be devastating to Russia, at least in the short term. “The cutoff would terminate all international transactions, trigger currency volatility, and cause massive capital outflows,” she [wrote this year](#).

The SWIFT system, which is based in Belgium, handles international payments among thousands of banks in more than 200 countries.

Since 2014, Moscow has taken steps to blunt the threat by developing its own system to process domestic credit card transactions, she noted. But it is another measure that would affect European countries more than the United States because they do so much more business with Russia.

Several economic and political analysts have said restricting access to SWIFT would be a last resort.

Arie W. Kruglanski, a psychology professor at the University of Maryland, said that in assessing the impact of sanctions, economists too often overlook the crucial psychological aspect.

“Sanctions can work when leaders are concerned about economic issues more than anything else,” he said, but he doesn’t think the Russian leader falls into that category. To Mr. Kruglanski, strongman authoritarians like [Mr. Putin](#) are motivated by a sense of their own significance, and threats are more likely to stiffen opposition rather than encourage compromise.

When it comes to Ukraine-related sanctions so far, the impact has been negligible, Mr. Nixey of Chatham House said.

“A lot of these things the Russians have learned to live with, partly because implementation has been slow or poor and effects on the Russian economy are manageable,” he added.

Success can be defined in various ways. Mr. Nixey said that the 2014 measures most likely deterred the Kremlin from further military interventions in Ukraine. A [report for the Atlantic Council](#), a think tank that focuses on international relations, released this spring came to the same that conclusion.

Sanctions certainly did not compel Russia to reverse its annexation of Crimea, Mr. Nixey said, but they may have persuaded Mr. Putin from taking more aggressive actions — at least until now.

HEADLINE	12/08 Tech helping poor people get govt. aid
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/08/us/politics/safety-net-apps-tech.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — In making his case that safety net programs should be easier to use, Jimmy Chen, a tech entrepreneur, recalled visiting a welfare office where people on food stamps endured long waits to submit routine paperwork.</p> <p>They passed the time as people in lines do, staring at their phones — which had the potential to do the work online with greater convenience, accuracy and speed.</p> <p>The image of aid-seekers wasting time with a solution literally in hand captures what critics call an overlooked challenge for people in poverty: Administrative burdens make benefits hard to obtain and tax the time and emotional resources of those who need help.</p> <p>“Too much bureaucracy prevents people from getting the help they need,” said Mr. Chen, whose start-up, Propel, offers a free app that five million households now use to manage their food stamp benefits.</p> <p>Barriers to aid are as old as aid itself, and they exist for reasons as varied as concerns about fraud, the bureaucratic tension between accuracy and speed, and hostility toward people in need. But the perils of red tape have drawn new attention since the coronavirus pandemic left millions of Americans seeking government help, many for the first time.</p> <p>The government approved vast increases in spending but often struggled to deliver the assistance. While some programs reached most households quickly (stimulus checks), others buckled under soaring demand (unemployment benefits) or daunting complexity (emergency rental aid).</p> <p>“The pandemic highlighted how difficult these programs can be to access,” said Pamela Herd, a professor at Georgetown and an author, with Donald P. Moynihan, of “Administrative Burden,” which argues that excessive bureaucracy deepens poverty and inequality.</p> <p>The share of eligible people receiving benefits varies greatly by program: It is about 82 percent for food stamps, 78 percent for the earned-income tax credit and 24 percent for Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, or cash welfare, according to government estimates. That means billions of dollars go unclaimed.</p> <p>On his first day in office, President Biden issued an executive order asking agencies to identify “systemic barriers in accessing benefits,” with the results due in January.</p> <p>Shaped by forces as diverse as the tech revolution, welfare rights and behavioral psychology, the movement to create a more user-friendly safety net was underway before the pandemic underscored the perils of bureaucracy.</p> <p>Code for America, a nonprofit group, spent years devising a portal that makes it easier for Californians to apply for food stamps. Civilla, a Detroit-based nonprofit, helped Michigan shrink its 42-page application by 60 percent.</p> <p>In an age of ambitious social movements, the cry of civic tech — power to the portals — may seem obscure, but Mr. Chen, 34, says democratizing technology’s rewards is essential to social justice.</p> <p>“For someone like me, a phone is like a magic wand,” he said. “If I want to call a cab, there’s an app; if I want to book a hotel, there’s an app; if I want to get a date, there’s an app. It’s just incredibly unfair that we don’t apply more of this sophisticated knowledge to the problems of lower-income Americans.”</p> <p>Among those drawn to the app — recently renamed Providers, from Fresh EBT — is Kimberly Wilson, a single mother in Spindale, N.C., who has a 7-year-old son and cleans vacation rental homes. With her</p>

work interrupted by the pandemic, she turned to food stamps, which is also known as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP.

What Ms. Wilson said she likes most about the SNAP app is the ability to instantly check her balance, which she does almost daily. “It’s a comfort knowing I’m going to be able to feed my kid,” she said.

The app also explains the timing and amounts of her payments better than the state, she said, and it steered her to a broadband subsidy that saved \$50 a month.

But the app’s rewards transcend the particulars, Ms. Wilson said: It leaves her feeling respected.

“It makes you feel like it’s normal to need help,” she said, which is especially welcome because she has relatives who post memes depicting people on SNAP as lazy and overfed. “It’s like somebody behind the screen is looking out for us. You feel like they care.”

Andrea Young, a Providers user in Charlotte, N.C., goes as far as to say the app “makes us feel like we’re Americans, too.”

With 42 million Americans receiving SNAP, many conservatives dispute the notion that aid is elusive. They see dependency as a greater concern than red tape and argue that administrative contact serves important goals, like deterring people who do not really need help or letting caseworkers encourage the jobless to find work.

“The system should be striving to help individuals achieve self-sufficiency through employment” rather than maximize benefits, said Jason Turner, who runs the Secretaries Innovation Group, which advises conservative states on aid policy. “When you pile benefit on top of benefit, you make it harder to break free.”

Poverty has long been linked to oppressive bureaucracy. “Little Dorrit,” the 1857 novel by Charles Dickens, lampoons the omnipotent “Department of Circumlocution,” whose stupefying procedures keep the heroine down. The 1975 documentary film “Welfare” offers a modern parallel with footage that one critic called [“unbearable in its depictions of frustration and anger”](#) among caseworkers and clients.

Sometimes barriers to aid are created deliberately. When Florida’s unemployment system proved unresponsive at the start of the pandemic, Gov. Ron DeSantis told CBS Miami last year that his predecessor’s administration devised it to drive people away. “It was, ‘Let’s put as many kind of pointless roadblocks along the way, so people just say, oh, the hell with it, I’m not going to do that,’” he said. (Mr. DeSantis and his predecessor, Rick Scott, are both Republicans.)

Other programs are hindered by inadequate staffing and technology simply because the poor people they serve lack political clout. Historically, administrative hurdles have been tools of racial discrimination. And federal oversight can instill caution because states risk greater penalties for aiding the ineligible than failing to help those who qualify.

To show that Michigan’s application was overly complex, Civilla essentially turned to theater, walking officials through an exhibit with fake clients and piped-in office sounds meant to trace an application’s bureaucratic journey. Working with the state, the company created a new application with 80 percent fewer words; the firm is now working in Missouri.

Michael Brennan, Civilla’s co-founder, emphasized that the Michigan work was bipartisan — it began under a Republican governor and continued under a Democrat — and saves time for the client and the state.

“Change is possible,” he said.

With its California portal, Code for America cut the time it took to apply for food stamps by three-quarters or more. The portal was optimized for mobile phones, which is how many poor people use the internet, and it offers chat functions in English, Spanish and Chinese. In counties with the technology, applications increased by 11 percent, while elsewhere the number fell slightly.

During the pandemic, Code for America built portals to help poor households claim stimulus checks and the expanded child tax credit. The latter alone delivered nearly \$400 million. David Newville, who oversaw the work, quoted a colleague to explain why web design matters: “Implementation is justice.”

As the son of struggling immigrants from China, Mr. Chen, the founder of Propel, understood hardship before he understood technology. “There wasn’t always enough to eat” in an otherwise happy Kansas City childhood, he said. (The family did not receive SNAP, though Mr. Chen does not know why.) He graduated from Stanford, worked at Facebook and left at 26 for a fellowship in New York, hoping to produce software for people in poverty.

Mr. Chen founded Propel in 2014 with \$11,000 from a Kickstarter campaign, pitched about 60 investors without success and went two years without a salary. After planning to work on SNAP applications, he shifted to focus on people who were already enrolled and developed the balance display.

The existing technology did allow people to check their balances, but it did not work well on mobile phones, and a phone line required a 16-digit number. While studying how poor people shop, Mr. Chen saw them buy cheap items — often a banana — to check the balance on their receipts. It struck him as “disrespectful,” one more hassle that they did not need.

In tech terms, a balance display was no special feat, but reaching SNAP recipients was. Mr. Chen said the app’s users checked it on average 17 times a month. Ms. Young, 54, said she checked it more frequently than that.

“I check it all day, every day,” she said. “It makes me reassured, knowing that I’m going to have food.” Ms. Young, who gets by on a disability payment of about \$800 a month after injuring her back, said she had run out of funds at the register; discarding items while others watched “makes you feel like you’re just pitiful.”

Ms. Wilson is so concerned about her balance that she keeps it in her head: It was \$14.02 the other day.

While the app does not let users talk to each other, she said it still created a sense of belonging among those who felt stigmatized. “It just made me see there were a whole group of people out there in the same circumstance,” she said.

The app also tells people how much they have spent and where they spent it; offers recipes and budgeting tools; and provides news about other benefits. It generates revenue by selling ads, often to grocers offering discounts or employers offering jobs; Mr. Chen said the goal was to align the company’s financial interests with those of its users.

In early 2016, the app had a few thousand users. A year later, it had about 200,000. Propel landed investments from Andreessen Horowitz, a top venture capital firm, and the sports stars Kevin Durant and Serena Williams. Forbes estimated that the company was worth \$100 million, a sum that Mr. Chen called “not far off.”

Partnering with a charity, Give Directly, during the pandemic, Propel distributed \$180 million to randomly selected app users, offering them \$1,000 each. It also moved into advocacy, adding a feature that lets users ask their members of Congress to extend the temporary child tax credit expansion.

The app now offers an account that can receive paychecks and other government benefits, prompted in part by the difficulties that the poorest households experienced in collecting stimulus checks, because they often lack stable bank accounts.

	<p>However they make ends meet, Mr. Chen said, poor people should know where they stand without having to buy a banana.</p> <p>“We pay hundreds of billions of dollars to fund these programs,” he said. “Why not make them work well?”</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	12/08 Federal govt. to be carbon neutral by 2050
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/08/climate/biden-government-carbon-neutral.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — President Biden on Wednesday set in motion a plan to make the federal government carbon neutral, ordering federal agencies to buy electric vehicles, to power facilities with wind, solar and nuclear energy, and to use sustainable building materials.</p> <p>In a series of executive orders, Mr. Biden directed the government to transform its 300,000 buildings, 600,000 cars and trucks, and use its annual purchases of \$650 billion in goods and services to meet his goal of a federal government that stops adding carbon dioxide into the atmosphere by 2050.</p> <p>From his earliest days in office, Mr. Biden said he intended to use the federal government as a model and to help spur the markets for green energy. The executive orders signed Wednesday set a timetable for the transition.</p> <p>By 2030, Mr. Biden wants the federal government to purchase electricity produced only from sources that do not emit carbon dioxide, the most plentiful of the human-caused greenhouse gases that are warming the planet. By 2032, the Biden administration wants to see the emissions from building operations, such as heating, cut in half. And by 2035, all new federal cars and truck purchases would also be zero-emissions.</p> <p>The move comes as Mr. Biden is struggling to turn many of his climate goals into reality. He has promised to cut America’s emissions from fossil fuels roughly in half by the end of this decade. But Congress has not yet approved a \$1.7 trillion spending bill that would help achieve that target. The Supreme Court also appears poised to limit the federal government’s ability to use certain regulatory actions to tackle climate change.</p> <p>The procurement goals could go a long way in transforming the clean energy markets, experts said.</p> <p>“It’s a similar strategy to what China is doing so successfully, leveraging the purchasing power of their government to create demand that markets can meet,” said Joshua Freed, senior vice president for climate and energy at Third Way, a centrist Democratic research group.</p> <p>“The federal government in so many areas is one of, if not the largest, purchaser,” Mr. Freed said. “Having the certainty the government is going to purchase cleaner products, materials and vehicles enables companies to move in that direction.”</p> <p>Unlike most executive orders that undergo a lengthy and sometimes fractious regulatory process before they are enacted, procurement rules can take effect almost immediately, said Richard L. Revesz, a professor of environmental law at New York University. He called the executive orders “very significant.”</p> <p>Still, the orders could be reversed by a future administration. And the plan does not cover purchasing by the Department of Defense, which accounts for a large portion of the government’s energy spending. Clean energy purchases could also cost the government more money in the short run, and many of the components like electric charging stations for an all-electric federal vehicle fleet have not yet been built.</p> <p>Republicans already are mounting opposition to the plan. On Wednesday Senator John Barrasso of Wyoming, the top Republican on the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, denounced it as “disgraceful” and said the plan would harm workers in the fossil fuel sector.</p>

“This is not build back better,” he said in a statement. “It’s another backbreaking move to build bigger bureaucracy.”

The plan Mr. Biden set forth presents significant challenges for the administration.

Just 40 percent of the electricity purchased by the federal government now comes from renewable sources like wind and solar. The goal is to ramp that up to 100 percent in less than a decade. The federal government currently consumes just 1.5 percent of the nation’s energy, although it is a major player in certain states where it has significant operations, such as Virginia, California, Georgia and North Carolina.

In converting its power to wind, solar and other sources that don’t produce planet-warming emissions, the government intends to follow the path set by companies like Google, Apple and Wal-Mart, which established tariffs or developed power-purchase agreements with local utilities to achieve their goals of 100 percent renewable energy, a senior administration official said.

The requirement to purchase only zero-emissions vehicles by 2035 is even more difficult.

Currently electric vehicles represent only about 1.5 percent of the government fleet. In fiscal year 2021 the administration purchased 650 electric vehicles, according to the administration, a number it hopes to increase several-fold this year and beyond. The government buys about 50,000 vehicles a year, many of those are replacements.

“That’s about half the annual output of one factory, about half of one percent of all vehicles sold every year,” said Steven Koonin, a physicist who was an under secretary of energy under President Barack Obama and who is now a climate policy fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, a conservative research organization. “It’s small potatoes.”

He called the electric vehicle plan more symbolic than game-changing. “If you go through the numbers, there’s no impact on emissions or the vehicle market,” said Mr. Koonin, whose views on climate change are at odds with the established scientific consensus.

Meanwhile, Robin Carnahan, the administrator of the General Services Administration, which oversees federal purchasing, called the plan “a massive opportunity to create millions of clean energy jobs, save taxpayer money through reduced energy costs, and build a more sustainable future for generations of Americans.”

Some environmental groups, however, said they did not believe the executive orders go far enough. Bill Snape, a senior counsel at the Center for Biological Diversity, said the goal of making the federal government carbon neutral by 2050 “is like a teenager promising to clean their room in 30 years.”

He and others called on the administration to do more, faster, and said they were frustrated by the legislative pace of the spending bill, which Mr. Biden has called his Build Back Better plan. Activists said they found the administration’s commitment lacking in light of a decision last month to open more than 80 million acres in the Gulf of Mexico to oil and gas drilling.

“Biden can’t use this one executive order to cover up the fact that Build Back Better, our best chance at meaningful climate legislation in his administration, has not passed,” Deirdre Shelly, campaign director of the Sunrise Movement, a climate change advocacy group, said. She called on Mr. Biden to “stand up against the fossil fuel industry.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	12/08 Drug firm \$200M settlement NY opioid trial
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/08/nyregion/allergan-settlement-opioid.html

GIST

A large pharmaceutical manufacturer has agreed to pay \$200 million in a settlement reached just before closing arguments began in a monthslong opioid trial in New York, the state's attorney general announced on Wednesday.

The settlement with Allergan, a company that has made opioids but whose most well-known product is Botox, is the latest agreement in a trial jointly argued by New York State and two counties that began in June. The case [was the first of its kind](#) brought against the entire opioid supply chain, from pharmaceutical companies that manufacture the pills to the distributors and pharmacy chains that filled the prescriptions.

Other defendants in the sprawling case, such as Johnson & Johnson and the pharmacy chain CVS, agreed to [multimillion-dollar settlements](#), before and during the trial. In July, three of the drug distributors [settled for more than \\$1 billion](#) combined as part of an overarching \$26 billion nationwide deal to settle a raft of more than 3,000 lawsuits filed by tribes, states and municipalities that said various companies helped foster a drug crisis that has killed hundreds of thousands of Americans in the last decade.

In the New York trial, only two companies, Teva Pharmaceuticals USA Inc., a manufacturer, and Andia Inc., one of its subsidiary companies that distributes drugs to pharmacies, remain defendants. The state and Nassau and Suffolk Counties jointly argued the case in New York State Supreme Court in Central Islip on Long Island.

"For more than two decades, opioids have wreaked havoc on New Yorkers and Americans across the nation — causing pain, addiction and death," Letitia James, New York's attorney general, said in a statement on Wednesday. "Our ongoing trial has been about the role companies like Allergan and its predecessors played in helping grow this epidemic, profiting while Americans suffered."

Last year, [a record number of people](#), more than 100,000, died of overdoses from prescription and black-market opioids as well as [synthetic versions like fentanyl](#), according to provisional data from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

As part of the settlement, Allergan will be barred from selling opioids in New York for the next 10 years. Katharine Nichols, a spokeswoman for AbbVie, the parent company, said that in 2020 Allergan had already voluntarily discontinued its branded prescription opioid business, which according to the company made up less than 1 percent of prescriptions nationwide.

In New York, the settlements could reach \$1.7 billion if certain conditions are met, and the money will be distributed to communities hit by the opioid crisis. The money will be used to pay for addiction prevention programs and treatment services, according to the attorney general's office, in an effort to mitigate the harm that lawyers argued the companies caused.

"Throughout the trial, we've heard just how devastating the opioid epidemic has been in terms of lives lost and the broader impact addiction has on families and communities," said Jayne Conroy, the lead counsel hired by Suffolk County, where over 3,000 people have died in the last 10 years from overdoses, according to county data.

"To be able to bring a settlement like this back to communities like Suffolk County that have been hit so hard is rewarding, but also a stark reminder of how much has already been lost," Ms. Conroy said in an email.

Allergan is expected to pay the \$200 million, which also includes legal fees, by the middle of 2022, according to the attorney general's office. More than \$150 million will go toward opioid abatement initiatives.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE 12/08 South Africa virus cases rise in children

SOURCE <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/08/world/africa/coronavirus-south-africa-children.html>

JOHANNESBURG — The children had gone to the hospital for various reasons: One had jaundice, another malaria. A third had a broken bone. But once they were admitted, they all tested positive for the coronavirus, a worrying trend in South African hospitals that hints at how transmissible the new variant, Omicron, may be.

The doctors in the children's wards of two large hospitals in Johannesburg say they have not seen a spike in admissions, and they still do not know whether the children have Omicron. But the increase in the number of those who test positive after coming in may provide a glimpse into the behavior of the heavily mutated variant that was discovered just last month, and about which little is known.

"Our suspicion is that Covid positivity rates in the community setting are very, very high at the moment and increasing," said Dr. Gary Reubenson, a pediatrician at the Rahima Moosa Mother and Child Hospital in Johannesburg.

Young children under 12 are not yet eligible for Covid-19 vaccines in South Africa, which also leaves them more vulnerable.

While it is still too soon to draw any conclusions about the severity of the illness caused by Omicron, early [modeling and analysis](#) suggest that it may move twice as fast as the Delta variant.

"What is scary now is the proportion of patients who are positive among those who are admitted is very high," said Dr. Sithembiso Velaphi, who works at the Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital in Soweto. "The number of admissions overall has not increased."

And although the number of young patients is relatively small, doctors noted that few of the children so far have needed oxygen.

The number of coronavirus cases in South Africa continues to rise exponentially in a fourth wave of infections that epidemiologists believe is [driven by Omicron](#). Since the variant was first sequenced and announced by South African doctors on Nov. 25, it has become the dominant version among samples tested in the country.

At the Rahima Moosa hospital, a public hospital that serves working-class neighborhoods in central Johannesburg, Dr. Reubenson said that he had not seen a spike in admissions but that a higher proportion of pediatric patients and pregnant women were testing positive for the coronavirus.

But, he cautioned, it is still too early to draw conclusions about the variant. On Tuesday, there were 10 patients in the pediatric Covid-19 ward, but very few showed respiratory symptoms. Only one child, who was diagnosed with pneumonia, needed oxygen, said Dr. Reubenson, who also works as a pediatric infectious diseases specialist at the University of the Witwatersrand medical school.

The relatively small number of Covid-19 patients needing oxygen was in line with findings in an early report from doctors at the Steve Biko Academic and Tshwane District Hospital Complex in Pretoria, currently the epicenter of the outbreak in South Africa.

At the Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital in Soweto, Dr. Velaphi has seen a similar pattern in the pediatric Covid-19 ward. On Tuesday, 12 children were admitted, three of whom needed oxygen.

It is still too soon to tell whether the children will develop a potentially more serious condition, multi-inflammatory syndrome, which has been found in some children who test positive for the virus. It can take about six to eight weeks after infection for that to develop, Dr. Velaphi said. Symptoms usually includes stomach pain, diarrhea and vomiting, among others.

In both hospitals, it was unclear how many of the children came from homes with vaccinated parents or guardians. In the labor ward at Rahema Moosa, it was also not clear how many pregnant women had been vaccinated.

But data from the National Institute of Communicable Diseases showed that many of the children who tested positive for the coronavirus had parents or guardians who were not vaccinated.

While preliminary studies show that previous infection may not protect against the new variant, the relaxation of regulations such as mask-wearing and social distancing in late October most likely played a part in the increased positivity rate, Dr. Reubenson said.

In the previous wave of infections, driven by the Delta variant, children made up 12 percent of positive coronavirus cases, according to data from the communicable diseases institute.

Then, during the South African winter, when children attended school on a staggered timetable, more teenagers were infected and admitted to hospital, said Dr. Waasila Jassat, a public health specialist at the National Institute of Communicable Diseases.

South Africa extended vaccination to children as young as 12 in October, with more than 652,000 vaccinated so far. The South African government authorized one shot of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine for the 12 to 17 age group, with the second dose available starting in January.

To bypass hesitant guardians and parents, teenagers do not need permission from their parents or guardians to get the shot at free, public vaccination stations.

This may account, Dr. Jassat said, for why there are more younger children testing positive than teenagers. It is not yet clear if South Africa's health products regulator will authorize the use of vaccines for children younger than 12.

As of last week, vaccine manufacturers had not yet sought approval to administer vaccines to children younger than 12 in South Africa, officials said.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	12/08 Britain introduces tougher Covid measures
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/08/world/europe/uk-covid-johnson.html
GIST	<p>LONDON — Prime Minister Boris Johnson of Britain on Wednesday announced major new restrictions to curb the fast-spreading Omicron variant, reversing course on a long-held policy at a moment of acute political peril for him, with his staff accused of flouting the rules by holding an office party during last year's lockdown.</p> <p>Mr. Johnson's decision to adopt a contingency plan he had long resisted — even in the face of Britain's already high daily rate of infections — underscored the threat posed by the new variant. But the timing raised questions about whether Mr. Johnson was motivated more by public health or politics.</p> <p>Critics, including a lawmaker from his own Conservative Party, accused the prime minister of trying to deflect attention from an outcry over whether officials held a holiday gathering that flouted lockdown rules in December 2020, when Britain was caught in the grip of an earlier coronavirus variant.</p> <p>Under the government's new guidance, known as Plan B, people in England will be urged to work from home if possible, starting next week. They will also be required to wear face masks in cinemas, theaters and most other indoor places, and to show a pass proving their vaccinated status to be allowed into nightclubs and large venues, like sports stadiums. He also said that negative tests would be included on vaccine passes as an alternative to proof of vaccination.</p> <p>"It's become increasingly clear that Omicron is growing much faster than the previous Delta variant, and is spreading rapidly throughout the world," the prime minister said. "We need to go further and faster still."</p>

Mr. Johnson delivered the news Wednesday evening in Downing Street's briefing room, its wood-paneled walls and Union Jack flags lending gravity to his words. But the same room was featured in a less dignified video that surfaced on Tuesday evening in which Mr. Johnson's former press secretary, Allegra Stratton, and other aides joked about whether an illicit party had been held in Downing Street during the lockdown.

That exchange, caught during the videotaping of a mock news conference last year, was deeply damaging to Mr. Johnson because it suggested that his aides ignored the very rules they were imposing on the public. They were mocking coronavirus rules at a moment when Britons had been ordered to cancel parties and family reunions, and when some were prevented from saying last farewells to dying relatives.

The smug tone of the mock news conference added to the outrage. At one point Ms. Stratton can be heard saying "Is cheese and wine all right?" and "This fictional party was a business meeting." She then laughs and adds, "And it was not socially distanced."

Ms. Stratton, who the prime minister had hired last year to conduct daily White House-style news briefings, resigned as an aide on Wednesday, offering a tearful apology for her remarks, which she acknowledged "seemed to make light of rules, rules that people were doing everything to obey."

For Mr. Johnson, who has struggled to chart a consistent course from the start of the pandemic, imposing new restrictions amid this outcry will be challenging. The prime minister has often seemed lackadaisical about the need for restrictions, neglecting to wear a mask when visiting hospitals. Allegations of a double standard have long attached themselves to his government.

Last year, his former chief adviser, Dominic Cummings, violated lockdown rules by driving 260 miles to see his parents in the north of England — and then visiting nearby Barnard Castle — at a time when people were being told not to leave home. Mr. Johnson initially stood by Mr. Cummings before cutting him loose months later.

Mr. Johnson denied that he was acting to deflect bad headlines. He tried to keep the focus on the medical data, which he said had encouraged Britons in the past to comply with restrictions on social distancing and vaccinations. There are now 568 cases of the Omicron variant in the country, he said, and it was doubling every two to three days.

Unless its spread is slowed, Omicron could result in between 1,000 and 2,000 hospitalizations a day, according to recently-published minutes from a meeting of the government's scientific advisory committee, SAGE. Mr. Johnson also hinted that he was thinking about mandatory vaccination, saying there should be a "national conversation" about the issues.

Public health experts welcomed Mr. Johnson's tougher measures, even if some said they were overdue. But they said the government's credibility gap cause by the furor over the office party would hamper its efforts to encourage compliance in the public.

"There's no trust in leadership right now, which is just a major blow during a pandemic when trust is vital," said Devi Sridhar, head of the global public health program at the University of Edinburgh. She said there was "a fuzzier line between what's true and what's false, which again is a death blow to public health messaging and response."

Downing Street has denied that a Christmas party took place but has not denied that an event of some kind took place. Mr. Johnson has insisted that any gathering that occurred followed Covid protocols.

At his weekly question-and-answer session at Parliament Wednesday, Mr. Johnson apologized for the video but said he was repeatedly assured that no party took place. He said the cabinet secretary, Simon Case, would investigate and that if there were breaches of lockdown rules there would be disciplinary action.

But Mr. Case's remit does not appear to extend to investigating reports of other parties in Downing Street last year including one that the Daily Mirror claims Mr. Johnson himself spoke at.

The leader of the opposition Labour Party, Keir Starmer, evoked Queen Elizabeth II as he drew an unflattering comparison to Mr. Johnson. "Does the prime minister think he has the moral authority to lead and ask the British to play by the rules?" he asked, as Mr. Johnson grimaced.

Tim Bale, a professor of politics at Queen Mary, University of London, said the contrast between the prime minister's reaction and Ms. Stratton's swift, emotional resignation statement might have worsened things for Mr. Johnson, "because it shows him up as someone who refuses to accept responsibility."

"He is quite a Houdini and predictions of his imminent demise may well be unfounded," Professor Bale said, "but I do think this is as much trouble as he's been in politically since he became prime minister."

Indeed, a week of negative headlines over the party saga appears to have dented trust in Mr. Johnson, according to one opinion survey. Asked by Opinium Research if they thought Mr. Johnson was telling the truth about what happened, 63 percent of respondents said he was not, compared with just 12 percent who believed him. More than half of those polled thought Mr. Johnson should resign.

Amid growing pressure on the prime minister, even some of his own lawmakers appealed publicly for him to get his story straight. One conservative lawmaker, Roger Gale, evoked Mr. Cummings's downfall, writing in a Twitter post that the crisis bore "all the hallmarks of another 'Barnard Castle' moment."

Worse for Mr. Johnson is the disquiet among his own allies in Parliament where there is a noisy faction that opposes new restrictions.

On Wednesday, before the prime minister announced the new measures, William Wragg, a Conservative lawmaker, said Covid passes "will not increase uptake of the vaccine but will create a segregated society," and asked Mr. Johnson whether he was aware that "very few will be convinced by this diversionary tactic."

As weary Londoners contemplated another Christmas compromised by Covid, there was a mixture of anger and resignation at the latest allegations that government officials had yet again violated the rules.

"I stick to the rules, mainly, but I do find it a bit hypocritical," said Robert Morrissey, 39, who was selling air-dried beef in front of Kings Cross Station. "It's one rule for them, and one rule for us."

Munther Mohammed, 32, a Ph.D student based in Cardiff, Wales, said, "Sometimes I feel like as soon as people see the government flouting the rules, they will also flout them — which is disappointing."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	12/08 He said, he said: readout disconnect
SOURCE	https://www.rferl.org/a/biden-putin-talks-analysis/31599058.html
GIST	<p>Amid a big Russian military buildup near Ukraine and on the Russian-controlled Crimean Peninsula, the Kremlin has kept a lot of people guessing about its plans and intentions.</p> <p>It did the same after President Vladimir Putin's video call with U.S. President Joe Biden on December 7, issuing a statement about the talks nearly two hours after the White House released its readout.</p> <p>When it came, one reason for the slower pace seemed clear: As has been the case several times in the past, the Kremlin readout was much longer than the White House statement. And it ranged decades back in time, making a reference to World War II and to a shared "special responsibility" for international security -- wording that seemed designed to evoke the Cold War era and portray Russia and the United States as great powers whose weight in the world is equal.</p>

Aside from being about the same meeting, the two statements had little in common, describing discussions of the same issues in strikingly different terms.

Example: Biden “voiced the deep concerns of the United States and our European allies about Russia’s escalation of forces surrounding Ukraine,” the White House said. In response, according to the Kremlin, Putin said that the United States must not blame Russia for tensions -- and proceeded to blame NATO. In doing so, Putin made a baseless claim that the Western alliance “is making dangerous efforts to conquer Ukrainian territory” -- something that Russia itself did when it seized Crimea in 2014.

The Kremlin said the talks were “frank and businesslike,” but a sense of tension seemed to ooze from that passage, which underscored how different the U.S. and Russian positions on the matters at hand have become.

The same disconnect was palpable in references to what seems to have been the only specific thing the two presidents agreed upon: There will be follow-up talks between U.S. and Russian officials.

But talks about what, exactly?

The accounts differed substantially in terms of content and context on this point, reflecting the starkly opposing positions on what is happening in Ukraine, as well as on security in Europe more broadly, and leaving the door wide open for disappointment and discord in the future.

The Russian readout suggested the follow-up talks would focus on what Moscow calls “security guarantees” that it has been seeking for years. In recent weeks, Moscow has pushed the issue with increasing insistence while also adding new details, making implicitly clear that the military buildup is aimed at least in part to get the West to comply.

Putin set out his demands in comments on December 1, saying that Russia will press for formal guarantees that NATO will not expand further eastward, including into Ukraine, and that unspecified “weapons systems posing a threat” to Russia will not be deployed “in close proximity” to its borders.

The Kremlin statement on the Biden-Putin call repeated those words with an adjustment on the weapons, saying that Russia “is seriously interested in receiving reliable, legally binding guarantees ruling out the eastward expansion of NATO” and the deployment of certain types of weapons in countries with which it shares borders.

“The leaders agreed to task their representatives with entering into detailed consultations on these sensitive issues,” it said.

Sensitive, indeed. The United States and NATO -- not to mention Kyiv -- say Russia cannot have a veto on Ukraine or any other country joining the Western alliance.

The White House statement put the agreement for talks in the context of Western concerns about a Russian threat to Ukraine.

Biden “reiterated his support for Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity and called for de-escalation and a return to diplomacy,” it said. “The two presidents tasked their teams to follow up, and the U.S. will do so in close coordination with allies and partners.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	12/08 UK: ‘effectively’ a diplomatic boycott
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Sports/wireStory/uk-effectively-boycott-beijing-winter-olympics-81621411
GIST	LONDON -- British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said Wednesday no U.K. government minister will attend the Beijing Winter Olympics, calling it “effectively” a diplomatic boycott.

Johnson was asked in the House of Commons whether the U.K. will join the United States, Australia and Lithuania in a diplomatic boycott of the Winter Games in February over Beijing's human rights record.

He said he opposed boycotts involving athletes, but Britain would effectively be boycotting the Olympics diplomatically.

"There will be effectively a diplomatic boycott of the Winter Olympics in Beijing," Johnson told lawmakers. "No ministers are expected to attend and no officials."

"The government has no hesitation in raising these issues with China, as I did with President Xi the last time I talked to him," he added.

The White House confirmed Monday that it was staging a diplomatic boycott of the upcoming Winter Olympics in Beijing to protest Chinese human rights abuses. China has vowed to react with "firm countermeasures."

Australia announced a diplomatic boycott of the 2022 Games earlier Wednesday. Prime Minister Scott Morrison said it was "in Australia's national interest," and referred to the worsening relations between his country and China — including a spat over Australia's decision to acquire nuclear-powered submarines — as well as human rights concerns.

Western governments, including the U.S., Australia and Britain, have increasingly criticized Beijing for human rights abuses against its Uyghur minority in the northwest Xinjiang province, which some have called genocide. They have also spoken out against Beijing's suppression of democratic protests in Hong Kong. Rights groups have called for a full-blown boycott of the Beijing Winter Games.

It wasn't immediately clear whether Britain's royal family could still attend the 2022 Games. Princess Anne, Queen Elizabeth II's daughter, was an Olympic equestrian and is president of the British Olympic Association.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	12/08 Job openings jumped in October
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2021/12/08/economy/job-openings-quits-october/index.html
GIST	<p>New York (CNN Business)American companies' search for workers didn't get any easier this fall.</p> <p>In October, the nation's available jobs unexpectedly rose to 11 million, new data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics showed Wednesday.</p> <p>Even though that was short of the 11.1 million high from July, it was still far more than the 10.4 million economists had predicted, which would have marked a small decrease from the prior month. Instead, job openings rose by more than 400,000.</p> <p>Leisure and hospitality, particularly hotels and food services, registered by far the biggest increase in available jobs.</p> <p>Meanwhile, hires stood at 6.5 million in October, underlining that the worker shortage problem is still alive and kicking.</p> <p>The number of US workers who quit their job decreased by more than 200,000 that month to 4.2 million, down from a record high in September.</p> <p>The number of layoffs was more or less unchanged at 1.4 million.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	12/08 Experts: CDC vaccination rates inflated
----------	--

SOURCE	https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/many-seniors-are-vaccinated-cdcs-covid-vaccination-rates-appear-inflat-rcna7941
GIST	<p>For nearly a month, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s online vaccine tracker has shown that virtually everyone 65 and older in the U.S. — 99.9 percent — has received at least one Covid-19 vaccine dose.</p> <p>That would be remarkable — if it were true.</p> <p>But health experts and state officials say it’s certainly not.</p> <p>They note that the CDC as of Sunday had recorded more seniors as having been at least partly vaccinated — 55.4 million — than there are people in the age group — 54.1 million — according to the latest census data from 2019. The CDC’s vaccination rate for residents 65 and older is also significantly higher than the 89 percent vaccination rate found in a poll conducted in November by KFF. Similarly, a YouGov poll conducted last month for The Economist found that 83 percent of people 65 and up said they had received at least an initial dose of a vaccine.</p> <p>And the CDC counts 21 states as having almost all their senior residents at least partly vaccinated (99.9 percent). But several of those states show much lower figures in their vaccination databases, including California, at 86 percent, and West Virginia, at nearly 90 percent as of Monday.</p> <p>The questionable CDC data on seniors’ vaccination rates illustrates one of the potential problems health experts have flagged about the CDC’s Covid vaccination data.</p> <p>Knowing with accuracy what proportion of the population has rolled up sleeves for Covid shots is vital to public health efforts, said Dr. Howard Forman, a professor of public health at Yale University School of Medicine.</p> <p>“These numbers matter,” he said, particularly in efforts to increase the rates of booster doses that have been administered. As of Sunday, about 47 percent of people 65 and older had received booster shots since the federal government made them available in September.</p> <p>“I’m not sure how reliable the CDC numbers are,” Forman said, pointing to the discrepancy between state data and the agency’s 99.9 percent figure for seniors, which he said can’t be correct.</p> <p>“You want to know the best data to plan and prepare and know where to put resources in place — particularly in places that are grossly undervaccinated,” he said.</p> <p>Getting an accurate figure on the proportion of residents who have been vaccinated is difficult for several reasons. The CDC and states may be using different population estimates. State data may not account for residents who get vaccinated in states other than where they live or in clinics in federal facilities, such as prisons, or those managed by the Veterans Health Administration or the Indian Health Service.</p> <p>CDC officials said the agency may not be able to determine whether people are getting their first, second or booster doses if they got their shots in different states or even from providers in the same city or state. That can lead the CDC to overestimate first doses and underestimate booster doses, CDC spokesperson Scott Pauley said.</p> <p>In a footnote on its Covid vaccination data tracker webpage, the CDC says: “There are challenges in linking doses when someone is vaccinated in different jurisdictions or at different providers because of the need to remove personally identifiable information (de-identify) data to protect people’s privacy. This means that, even with the high-quality data CDC receives from jurisdictions and federal entities, there are limits to how CDC can analyze those data.”</p> <p>On its dashboard, the CDC has capped the percentage of the population that has received a vaccine at 99.9 percent. But Pauley said the figures could be off for multiple reasons, such as potential data-reporting</p>

errors or the census denominator's not including everyone who lives in a particular county, like part-time residents.

Liz Hamel, the vice president and director of public opinion and survey research at KFF, agrees that it's highly unlikely that 99.9 percent of seniors have been vaccinated. She said the differences between CDC vaccination rates and those found in KFF and other polls are significant. "The truth may be somewhere in between," she said.

Hamel noted that the KFF vaccination rates tracked closely with the CDC's figures in the spring and summer but began diverging in the fall, just as booster shots became available. KFF surveys show that the percentage of adults who had been at least partly vaccinated changed little from September to November, moving from 72 percent to 73 percent. But CDC data show an increase from 75 percent in September to 81 percent in mid-November.

As of Sunday, the CDC says, 83.4 percent of adults had been at least partly vaccinated.

William Hanage, an associate professor of epidemiology at Harvard University, said such discrepancies call the CDC figure into question. He said getting an accurate figure on the percentage of seniors who have been vaccinated is important because the age group is most vulnerable to severe consequences of Covid, including death.

"It is important to get them right because of the much-talked-about shift from worrying about cases to worrying about severe outcomes like hospitalizations," Hanage said. "The consequences of cases will increasingly be determined by the proportion of unvaccinated and unboosted, so having a good handle on this is vital for understanding the pandemic."

For example, CDC data show that New Hampshire leads the country in vaccination rates, with about 88 percent of its population having been at least partly vaccinated. The [New Hampshire vaccination dashboard](#) shows that 61.1 percent of residents have been at least partly vaccinated, but the state isn't counting all people who get their shots in pharmacies because of data collection issues, said Jake Leon, a spokesperson for the state Department of Health and Human Services.

In addition, Pennsylvania health officials say they have been working with the CDC to correct vaccination rate figures on the federal website. The state is trying to remove duplicate vaccination records to make sure the dose classification is correct — from initial doses through boosters — said Mark O'Neil, a spokesperson for the state Health Department.

As part of the effort, the CDC late last month reduced the reported percentage of adults in the state who had received at least one dose from 98.9 percent to 94.6 percent. It also lowered the percentage of seniors who have been fully vaccinated from 92.5 percent to 84 percent.

However, the CDC hasn't changed its figure for the proportion of seniors who have been partly vaccinated. It remains at 99.9 percent. The CDC dashboard says that, as of Sunday, 3.1 million seniors in Pennsylvania had been at least partly vaccinated. The [latest census data](#) show that Pennsylvania has 2.4 million people 65 and older.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	12/08 Hospitalizations: 6 states half of US cases
SOURCE	https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/6-states-account-half-countrys-recent-covid-hospitalizations-rcna7776
GIST	<p>Covid-19 hospitalizations are once again rising in the United States.</p> <p>Among the 30-plus states that have seen increases in Covid-19 hospitalizations over the last two weeks, six stand out.</p>

Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Pennsylvania, New York and Illinois have accounted for the majority of the country's increase in hospital beds filled, according to an NBC News analysis of U.S. Department of Health and Human Services data.

While these states make up 35 percent of the population among states with [increasing Covid hospitalizations](#), they make up 60 percent of the added beds, the analysis showed.

The nationwide increase began in early November, when the U.S. was averaging about 45,000 hospitalizations per day. It has since ticked up to nearly 58,000 per day, according to the analysis. Health experts say they fear hospitalizations could continue to surge this winter as more Americans head indoors and the fast-moving delta variant continues to spread.

Since HHS began tracking Covid hospitalizations in early 2020, the U.S. has crossed the 50,000 mark five times. Delta's first hospitalization surge this summer saw a peak of more than 100,000 hospitalizations, on average, and last winter's surge peaked at more than 137,000 hospitalizations, on average.

While [much of the world](#) is focused on the new [omicron variant](#), first identified in South Africa, [delta is still a threat](#), as "over 99 percent of sequenced cases in the United States continue to be from" that strain, Dr. Rochelle Walensky, the director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said Tuesday at a White House Covid-19 Response Team briefing.

Hospitalizations in Michigan, which has the highest share of new hospitalizations when adjusted for population, are up 70 percent since Nov. 10. In the neighboring states of Indiana and Illinois, hospitalizations have almost doubled.

In Michigan, 3 of 4 Covid patients are [unvaccinated](#), according to Chelsea Wuth, an associate public information officer at the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services.

[Unvaccinated people](#) make up 87 percent of Covid patients who are in an [intensive care unit](#) in the state, she said, and 88 percent of Covid patients who are on a ventilator are unvaccinated. More than 70 percent Michiganders age 16 and older have had at least one shot of a Covid vaccine, she said.

Dr. Matthew Sims, a physician and director of infectious disease research at Beaumont Health, the state's largest health care system, said "almost all" the Covid patients coming in are unvaccinated. Roughly 600 patients are sickened with Covid across the system as of Tuesday, he said, noting the staff is exhausted.

"We've been doing this for so long," he said. "It does get tiring to the nurses, the doctors, everybody when we see this huge number of patients that are all coming in that are not vaccinated."

He said the system's network of hospitals and outpatient sites is prepared for a potential surge in patients this winter; they've gathered enough personal protective equipment and have mandated Covid vaccinations for the entire staff.

It's still unclear whether the heavily mutated omicron variant will exacerbate the situation seen at hospitals over the colder months, experts say, though [early reports suggest the new strain may cause milder symptoms](#).

Sims said he is concerned about omicron "and whether it is going to take over and make things worse." It's some 50 mutations "is scary," he said, but he added that scientists and the public still need to wait for more data.

In Ohio, the state with the second highest share of new hospitalizations, health officials warned last week that the state is approaching the record admissions seen in January, when there were about 4,000 patients hospitalized with Covid statewide.

Dr. Bruce Vanderhoff, director of Ohio's Department of Health, [said during a news conference](#) that cases aren't occurring evenly among age groups.

Young people, particularly those between the ages of 23 and 49, have a case rate that's 25 percent higher than the statewide average, he said.

As in Michigan, the vast majority of hospitalized patients in Ohio are unvaccinated, Vanderhoff said.

State officials continue to urge people to get vaccinated. Doing so would help hospitals in the state as they face staffing challenges.

"Almost every hospital really doesn't have the elasticity that maybe we had this time last year to really expand capacity on a short-term notice when there's a flood or surge in local patients," Dr. Andy Thomas, with Ohio State University's Wexner Medical Center, said at the same briefing. "If these trends continue through the month of December into January, we will be at a point where the hospitals in Ohio will not be able to take care of all the patients we need to take care of."

Last week, in the state of New York, home to the fifth largest share of new hospitalizations, Gov. Kathy Hochul announced that hospitals with less than 10 percent capacity must stop doing elective surgeries until at least Jan. 15, 2020.

There are around 50 hospitals that meet that criteria, the vast majority of which are upstate, Hochul [said during a press conference last Thursday](#).

Dr. Celine Gounder, an infectious disease specialist at NYU Langone Health in New York City, said people may be getting tired as the country approaches two years into the pandemic.

People "think in terms of personal action, personal responsibility, personal freedom, and unfortunately that's not how viruses transmit and infect," she said.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	12/07 'Cautious' China shifts Africa approach
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/dec/08/more-cautious-china-shifts-africa-approach-from-debt-to-vaccine-diplomacy
GIST	<p>As debt concerns rise and a new coronavirus variant emerges, China appears to be adjusting its approach to Africa: cutting finance pledges while doubling down on vaccine diplomacy.</p> <p>On Monday last week, China's leader, Xi Jinping, opened a China-Africa forum with a pledge to supply 1bn vaccine doses to Africa, amid global concern over the emergence of the Omicron variant of Covid-19. He also pledged \$40bn to the continent, ranging from credit lines to investments – a significant cut from the \$60bn promised at the previous two summits.</p> <p>Analysts say the shift in approach signifies Beijing's rethink about its overall strategy on the continent at a time of Covid health emergency and great power competition.</p> <p>"In a way Xi's reduced financial pledge is not surprising because we've already seen signs in the last couple of years," says Lina Benabdallah of Wake Forest University in North Carolina. "China has entered a phase of greater caution with regard to Africa. After two decades of heavy state funding, it is beginning to pull the brakes."</p> <p>The caution, as Carlos Lopes of the University of Cape Town notes, partly derives from the west's long-held narrative about China's alleged debt trap and taking advantage of the Africans to exploit natural resources and export their cheap goods.</p>

“[Beijing is] sensitive to criticism and [is] reacting to it by applying tools they know will please and obfuscate firm negative views resulting from past exposure,” Lopes says. “... [W]e are witnessing a change to a more technocratic approach; obviously more cautious, using soft conditionality and creating new instruments to control flows tighter.”

Moral high ground

The pledged billion doses includes 600m donations and 400m locally produced, and is in addition to 200m doses already delivered to African nations under previous pledges. Xi says China will also send 1,500 health experts to Africa to assist.

Xi’s words came at a time when China’s vaccine diplomacy is under heavy scrutiny. Yet Carlos Oya, an expert on China-Africa relations at Soas, University of London, says that if extending vaccination in Africa truly contributes to a gradual end of the pandemic worldwide, this could be an important achievement.

“[It’s] potentially giving impetus to a narrative that China has contributed to end this pandemic beyond its borders.”

Chris Alden, director of the thinktank LSE Ideas, says that with this announcement, China would hope to be in a position to occupy the moral high ground by addressing an acute crisis being experienced by a fellow developing region and concurrently demonstrating its capacity to produce and deliver vaccines across Africa.

“This global public good will concurrently open up more market opportunities for Chinese pharmaceuticals in the spirit of the oft-quoted adage of ‘doing good while doing well’,” he says.

Critics, however, argue that Xi’s emphasis on vaccines in Africa is not new. In late February, China pledged to provide vaccines to 19 African countries. To date, 46 African countries have been receiving vaccines from China. Out of the 155m pledged doses to Africa so far, China has delivered 107m, of which only 16m have been donations, according to [Bridge Beijing, a vaccine tracker](#).

‘An urgency that can’t wait’

The Omicron outbreak, which was first detected by South African scientists who then alerted the world, has highlighted the stark gaps in vaccination rates. Around 11% of people on the African continent have had at least one dose, while [just 7% are fully vaccinated](#). By contrast, nearly [32% of the UK population](#) aged 12-plus have already had their third jab.

“There have been lots of great words by various leaders but the actual vaccines delivery has not met the promises made ... by Covax, the US, by Australia,” says Prof Joel Negin, head of the University of Sydney’s school of public health.

Covax has secured pledges of about 5.59bn doses from various governments but delivered just 585m. Australia has promised about 60m doses to other countries, Negin says, but delivered about 9m.

“We see now there’s an urgency that can’t wait.”

Health bodies and experts have long warned that leaving developing countries under-vaccinated increased the risk of new variants emerging to threaten the whole world. But unequal distribution of vaccines has seen entire regions such as Africa mostly unvaccinated while rich countries begin rolling out booster shots. [One recent analysis](#) suggested two-thirds of people in high-income countries were fully vaccinated, compared with just 2.5% of the population in low-income countries.

There are a couple of reasons for the shortfall, says Negin, including the lack of production capacity outside a few nations.

	<p>“We’ve had two years, we should have set up systems and invested in production capacity in south-east Asia, southern Africa, for production of mRNA vaccines,” he says. “It can’t be done overnight but we have to start on setting up those capabilities.”</p> <p>The delay was in large part due to continued refusals by governments to issue intellectual property waivers on the vaccines, he adds – something backed by US president Joe Biden and which Xi also called for in his speech.</p> <p>Xi said: “We need to put people and their lives first, be guided by science, support waiving intellectual property rights on Covid-19 vaccines, and truly ensure the accessibility and affordability of vaccines in Africa to bridge the immunisation gap.”</p> <p>While China has delivered fewer vaccines to Africa than it has elsewhere, it has been committing more than most bilateral donors and the Covax initiative, says Leah Lynch, deputy director of Development Reimagined, an African-led international development consultancy.</p> <p>She says the key part of Xi’s speech was not the 600m donations but the 400m coming from joint productions. “This ... is a demand-led initiative which came from Africa. They want to be able to do that vaccine production themselves.”</p> <p>Egypt has already made a deal to produce Sinovac, while Senegal will produce Sinopharm, and 14 Chinese pharmaceutical companies were also involved in production or investment in Africa, Lynch says.</p> <p>“It’s ultimately about self-sufficiency.”</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	12/08 Omicron cases double in UK every 2-3 days
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/dec/08/omicron-covid-cases-doubling-every-two-to-three-days-in-uk-says-scientist
GIST	<p>The spread of the Omicron variant of coronavirus appears to be doubling every two to three days, Prof Neil Ferguson has said, adding that it could be necessary to impose new lockdowns as a result.</p> <p>Ferguson, a member of the UK government’s Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (Sage) and head of the disease outbreak modelling group at Imperial College London, told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme on Wednesday that Omicron was likely to be the dominant strain in the UK before Christmas.</p> <p>“It’s likely to overtake Delta before Christmas at this rate, precisely when is hard to say,” Ferguson said, speaking in a personal capacity.</p> <p>“We’ll start seeing an impact on overall case numbers – it’s still probably only 2%, 3% of all cases so it’s kind of swamped, but within a week or two we’ll start seeing overall case numbers accelerate quite markedly as well.”</p> <p>He said so far case numbers were particularly high in London and Scotland. “London is to be expected because that’s where most of our foreign visitors come,” he added. He said it was less clear why it had spread more quickly in Scotland but speculated that it could be linked with the Cop26 summit in Glasgow.</p> <p>The number of cases of the original Omicron variant detected in the UK rose by 101 to 437 on Tuesday as Scotland announced a return to working from home.</p> <p>Regarding lockdowns, Ferguson said it was difficult to rule out anything, adding that we “haven’t got a good enough handle on the threat”.</p>

He added: “Clearly, if the consensus is it is highly likely that the NHS is simply going to be overwhelmed then it will be for the government to decide what what he wants to do about that, but it’s a difficult situation to be in of course.”

Pushed on whether lockdowns might be possible, he said: “It certainly might be possible at the current time.”

He also noted preliminary work in the UK that suggests that two doses of Pfizer are roughly half as protective against mild disease as against other variants. But he said: “We think that protection against severe disease is much more likely to be maintained at the high level, but we don’t have firm data on that. That’s just based on extrapolation from past experience.”

Ferguson called the pace of Omicron’s growth “very fast”, saying: “It’s the same if not faster than we saw with the original strain of the virus in March last year, so it is a concern.”

He said data on the evasion of vaccines was preliminary but pointed to a study in South Africa that said “this virus Omicron can evade immunity antibodies generated against the very original Chinese strain of the virus better than any variant we’ve seen so far”.

Lockdowns or other restrictions could help to protect people from infection and gather information, Ferguson said. “There is a rationale, just epidemiologically, to try and slow this down, to buy us more time principally to get boosters into people’s arms because we do think people who are boosted will have the best level of protection possible, but also to buy us more time to really better characterise the threat.

“So if you imagine a kind of plan B plus with working from home might slow it down – it wouldn’t stop it but it could slow it down, so it’s doubling rather than every two or three days, every five or six days.

“That doesn’t seem like a lot, but it actually is potentially a lot in terms of allowing us to characterise this virus better and boost population immunity.”

Ferguson said the “key question” of whether the UK decided to attempt to slow the spread of Omicron would “critically depend on really the threat it poses in terms of hospitalisations. At the moment we don’t really have a good handle on the severity of this virus.

“There’s a little hint in the UK data that infections are a little bit more likely to be asymptomatic. But we really need to firm up that evidence at the current time.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	12/08 India military chief dies in helicopter crash
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/bipin-rawat-indias-top-military-official-dies-in-helicopter-crash-11638970855?mod=hp_lead_pos10
GIST	<p>NEW DELHI—India’s top military official, Bipin Rawat, died Wednesday in a helicopter crash in the southern state of Tamil Nadu, the country’s air force said.</p> <p>Mr. Rawat, 63 years old, the country’s chief of defense staff, was traveling along with his wife, staff and security commandos in the Russian-made helicopter at the time of the crash.</p> <p>There were 14 passengers on board, and 13 died, the air force said. One injured air force official was being treated at a local military hospital.</p> <p>Mr. Rawat’s “insights and perspectives on strategic matters were exceptional. His passing away has saddened me deeply,” Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted.</p> <p>The crash came two days after the Russian and Indian leaders met in New Delhi and agreed to extend their countries’ close defense ties—despite U.S. pressure on India to wean itself off Russian arms supplies.</p>

	India has a fleet of Russian-made Mi-17 series choppers that are used frequently by top military brass and government officials for traveling to defense locations.
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	12/08 Covid-era travel risks are changing
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/covid-omicron-travel-restrictions-quarantines-11638910449?mod=hp_featst_pos5
GIST	<p>At least you can see hurricanes coming.</p> <p>The new Omicron variant did more than prompt governments to quickly close borders and tighten Covid-19-related travel restrictions. It signaled that health disruptions are here to stay as a normal part of travel concerns, right along with storms, strikes and terrorism.</p> <p>For travelers, this means that you must now consider a new set of risks before making your trip, especially when going abroad. Travel can spread disease. There's also uncertainty over testing and quarantines.</p> <p>If you miscalculate or misstep, or just end up in the wrong place at the wrong time, you could be stranded, perhaps for weeks. Such a high penalty may make some people change where and how often they venture away from home.</p> <p>"The casualness of travel is gone. I don't think it's coming back," says Jay Sorensen, president of travel consulting firm IdeaWorksCompany.</p> <p>He thinks 2019 will be viewed as the high-water mark for jumping on a plane spur-of-the-moment and taking a trip to another continent without care or concern.</p> <p>Travel experts say the rapid reaction of various governments increases the risk of getting stuck in another country. It also appears to be the new standard procedure for any kind of new health risk.</p> <p>Israel, Morocco and Japan closed borders before the severity or risk of the Omicron variant was clear. The U.S. banned entry for citizens of some African countries and on Monday changed testing requirements for all people entering the country. The new rule requires a negative test within one day of travel instead of three days before takeoff, throwing a curveball at travelers already abroad.</p> <p>"Travelers will likely have to bake into their travel plans a possibility that a variant will all of a sudden be discovered and start spreading like wildfire," says Sumedha Senanayake, director of global intelligence for Crisis24, a firm that advises big companies on risks for traveling employees.</p> <p>The International Air Transport Association, an airline group, clearly sensed the change with a Nov. 26 statement blasting quick border-closing decisions as a threat to air-travel recovery.</p> <p>"Governments are responding to the risks of the new coronavirus variant in emergency mode, causing fear among the traveling public," says Willie Walsh, the director general of IATA and former British Airways chief. "As quickly as possible we must use the experience of the last two years to move to a coordinated, data-driven approach that finds safe alternatives to border closures and quarantine. Travel restrictions are not a long-term solution to control Covid variants."</p> <p>Other travel groups quickly sensed a change. The American Society of Travel Advisors, which represents travel agents, called on the Biden administration to revisit the new, stricter travel rules as soon as possible. Existing testing and vaccination requirements should be enough to combat viral spread, ASTA says, "without destroying an entire sector of the U.S. economy in the process."</p>

Of course, most countries have made these tough calls that often end up giving priority to people's health over the financial well-being of the travel industry. This pattern is likely to continue, travel-risk experts like Mr. Senanayake say, raising the risk of getting delayed or stranded.

There's also widespread confusion and hassle over what you need [to cross borders these days](#). There's no uniformity in what countries require in terms of vaccination, documentation or specific Covid tests and how soon before-flight tests need to be performed.

"If there was uniformity, a lot of this would be a lot easier. But there is never going to be uniformity," Mr. Senanayake says.

The new restrictions haven't prompted airline panic. OAG, which tracks airline schedules, says industry capacity world-wide, measured by the number of seats in schedules, is down only 0.5% this week compared with the previous week.

Mr. Sorensen issued a report last week to travel-industry clients suggesting that airlines, hotels and others are going to have to bear more risk of disruption if they want people to keep traveling. Change-fee penalties and nonrefundable reservations got temporary waivers during the pandemic, but they have already started creeping back in, making the consumer largely responsible for losses from unexpected disruptions.

Instead, he thinks travel companies are going to have to bear more risk to entice travelers, either by making reservations refundable or by providing insurance that will accommodate health risks and fears at airline expense.

"If there's a whole lot of pain and effort required to get there, why do I want to go there?" Mr. Sorensen says.

Travel insurance is one tool that can give travelers some protection against the costs of disruption. If you happen to test positive abroad and need to quarantine in a hotel for 14 days, unexpected costs can be huge. When flights shut down, you may need to find a new way home that becomes a lot more expensive.

Squaremouth, a travel insurance comparison and sales site, says sales rose 53% after news broke of the Omicron variant. That compares with a jump of 20% following news of the Delta variant. Travelers are learning to quickly seek protection.

Travel insurance sales had been growing with the return of so much leisure travel, and Squaremouth says its sales of travel insurance policies surpassed 2019 levels in the third quarter. The company's sales have reached an all-time high.

But [buyer beware](#): Many travel insurance policies don't cover things like border closings—or more specifically, fears. Not wanting to go because of a surge of new infections won't be covered by most travel insurance policies. And in many cases, coverage for things like travel warnings only works if you buy the policy before the warning is issued.

Travel insurance policies may say they offer Covid-19 protection, but their terms may limit that to cases where you actually contract the disease. Just trying to avoid surges, or being prudent by postponing travel because of new restrictions, often won't be protected.

If you want broad protection for your investment in future travel, look at Cancel For Any Reason policies. They cost more and typically cover only 70% of the trip's cost. But they give you the flexibility to make your own decision about whether to go without too much financial loss.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	12/08 Report: world unprepared next pandemic
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2021/12/08/next-pandemic-global-health-security-index/

Nearly two years into a [coronavirus](#) pandemic that has killed more than 5 million people, every country, including the United States, remains dangerously unprepared to respond to future epidemic and pandemic threats, according to [a report](#) released Wednesday assessing the efforts of 195 countries.

Researchers compiling the Global Health Security Index — a project of the Nuclear Threat Initiative, a D.C.-based nonprofit global security group, and the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security at the Bloomberg School of Public Health — found insufficient capacity in every country, which they said left the world vulnerable to future health emergencies, including some that might be more devastating than covid-19.

The assessment of each country's ability to prevent, detect and respond to health emergencies in 2021 was based on public information. Researchers also weighed other factors, such as public confidence in government. The average country score for 2021 was 38.9 out of a possible 100 points, essentially unchanged from 2019. No country scored above 75.9.

The United States, with its vast wealth and scientific capability, maintained its top overall ranking — it was also No. 1 when the first index was [released in 2019](#). But the United States also scored lowest on public confidence in government, a key factor associated with high numbers of coronavirus cases and deaths. That factor may explain why other countries that received top marks in 2019 also responded poorly during the pandemic.

Over nearly two years, the report said, U.S. politicians have questioned the motives and messages of health officials and debated the seriousness of the virus and the [effectiveness](#) and safety of vaccines. “The result: in many areas of the country, people have been [unwilling to comply](#) with public health recommendations that would slow the spread of the virus.”

The other countries in the top 10: Australia, Finland, Canada, Thailand, Slovenia, the United Kingdom, Germany, South Korea and Sweden.

Although the report identifies preparedness resources and capacities available in a country, it cannot predict how well they will be used in a crisis. “If you were trying to measure places that are at risk for fires, you want to know if the place has fire alarms,” said Jennifer Nuzzo, a senior scholar at Hopkins.

“But if you live in a country where the alarms go off and your political leaders tell you, ‘Pay no attention to that alarm, don’t leave the building,’” that doesn’t mean that the fire alarms don’t work, she said.

For instance, it found that the United States had more capacity to prevent and respond to epidemics than any other country, but it also had [more reported cases and deaths](#) than any other nation.

Some countries had a foundation for preparedness that “did not necessarily translate into successfully protecting against the consequences of the disease because they failed to also adequately address high levels of public distrust in government,” the authors wrote.

Nuzzo put it more bluntly. “We started this pandemic with a leg up, and we should have done better,” she said. “If you don’t have public trust in government, you can have the greatest vaccines in the world but people won’t take them.”

Researchers gave credit to countries that demonstrated sustainable efforts that could be applied to a range of disease threats, and that were transparent about their capacities. That’s where countries such as Israel and Singapore lost points, Nuzzo said.

“We don’t want to give passes to certain countries that we know inherently have the capacity, because we have colleagues there,” she said. “When an outbreak happens, every other country is going to be looking to them and asking if they can contain it, and some countries make it more clear what the answer is.”

The 268-page report found some encouraging signs. It noted big gains in New Zealand's laboratory strength and disease detective workforce. Although Angola and Rwanda are not among the top-scoring countries, both received generally high praise for their covid-19 responses and saw improvements in their scores from 2019, Nuzzo said.

But although many countries were able to quickly ramp up new labs and create armies of contact tracers to track the spread of the coronavirus, they didn't develop strategies for creating and scaling responses to future emergencies, the report found.

Among its recommendations: Countries should allocate funds for health security in their national budgets; international organizations should identify countries most in need of additional support; the private sector should look for ways to partner with governments; and philanthropies should develop new financing mechanisms, such as a global health security matching fund, to prioritize resources.

Tom Frieden, a former director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, agreed with the report's bottom line. "No country is adequately prepared and there's a need for urgent action to address that," he said.

But, he added, "we need assessments that monitor the actual performance of health systems."

Frieden, who is chief executive of Resolve to Save Lives, part of the global public health organization Vital Strategies, said his group has developed a global goal for early detection and response to health threats called 7-1-7: Countries should be able to identify a suspected threat within seven days, inform the next levels of public health authority within one day, and mount an effective response within another seven days.

Nuzzo said researchers who produced the 2021 report added measures that reflected some of the lessons learned so far from the coronavirus pandemic, including laboratory strength and quality, medical stockpiles and contact tracing capability. Experts also discussed whether some variables, such as public trust in government, should be given additional weight. But ultimately, they decided against it because it wasn't clear how much weight to give those factors for future health emergencies.

Two individuals who played key roles in the first report have since joined the Biden administration. Beth Cameron, a vice president at NTI, was tapped in January to lead the Directorate of Global Health Security and Biodefense at the National Security Council (NSC). She had also been the senior director for global health security and biodefense at the NSC under President Barack Obama. Tom Inglesby, director of the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security, is also a senior adviser for the administration's covid-19 response at the Department of Health and Human Services.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	12/08 Supply-chain problems hit beverages
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2021/12/08/beverage-supply-chain-shortages/
GIST	<p>The holidays tend to make Americans very, very thirsty. And that's a problem this year, with supply chain snarls hitting the beverage industry — from soda to energy drinks, booze to beer — especially hard. Things could get even tougher in the next couple months.</p> <p>While typical grocery categories are experiencing 5 to 10 percent of products out of stock right now, beverage shortages are higher, with around 13 percent missing from shelves. Shortages have been showing up in waters, iced teas and soft drinks, as well as beer, hard seltzer and canned cocktails.</p> <p>"All the talk around the holidays is about what might be under the Christmas tree, but not enough attention is paid to what consumers are already dealing with," said Geoff Freeman, chief executive of the Consumer Brands Association, the national trade association for consumer packaged goods.</p> <p>A shortage of bottles and cans is responsible for much of it, but trucking and shipping snarls, missing ingredients, labor woes and even freak weather are all contributing to shortages, leaving grocers</p>

scrambling to fill in the gaps. It's just the latest example of ongoing food supply problems that have shown up in a variety of sectors, wreaking havoc on prices and contributing to the highest inflation in three decades.

Freeman said the empty shelves reflect "demand unlike what we've seen in recent history running headfirst into problems with access to ingredients and materials."

The problems are certainly true for the world's largest beverage company, Coca-Cola, whose chief executive James Quincey has said repeatedly that consumers will see sporadic shortages on grocery shelves through 2022.

The company is seeing strong sales, but Quincey said supply chain problems are "a bit like whack-a-mole" during a recent third quarter earnings call. He described shipping, freight and labor problems; ingredient shortages; as well as freak and unexpected challenges — a plastics factory in Brazil bursting into flames or the rising cost of natural gas causing a global shortage of CO₂, which gives soda its bubbles.

Many major beverage brands have reported similarly significant problems, according to Howard Telford, head of soft drinks research at Euromonitor International, a market research firm. Monster Beverage, which makes a line of energy drinks, reported shortages in aluminum cans in the United States and Europe last quarter, along with higher prices and delays from importing materials. PepsiCo has also been facing shortages in terms of packaging, Telford said, including running out-of-stock, particularly in Gatorade over the summer. Telford said a shortage of resin used in plastic packaging could be one of several issues contributing to this shortage.

Beverage companies have faced a different slate of obstacles compared to other food categories. The pandemic has changed the way people buy and drink everything from bubbly water to Diet Coke, which has proved challenging for beverage companies, especially when it comes to packaging.

When restaurants and bars shut down last year, bottlers got through it by moving away from fountain and single-serve drinks and focusing instead on multipacks and larger-format packages like 2-liter bottles, things people loaded up on at the grocery store to drink at home.

Beverage companies focused on core brands and flavors, cutting back on the total number of drinks they produced, so they could meet a surge in customers stocking up at grocery stores. But when Americans stopped staying home so much, re-engaging with the wider world in the summer months — and faster than expected in some areas — those changes prompted a huge rise in demand for "immediate consumption" packaging, Telford said. Fountain drinks and single-serve containers were red hot again.

"I've never seen a year where the overall effort is as high to get product out," said Bill Creelman, founder of Spindrift Beverage Co., which makes a national line of sparkling waters infused with real juice. Creelman admits that in recent months, grocery stores have run out of some kinds of Spindrift, when demand outstripped supply. But there are some odd reasons for tight supply.

"When vaccines needed to be moved by refrigerated trucks, overnight refrigerated trucks were not available or were more expensive," said Creelman, who transports fresh fruit from farms in refrigerated trucks as ingredients for his Spindrift flavors. "Overnight, our truck prices doubled. There's a trickle-down effect, of us not always having what we want, and the just-in-time nature of our supply chain."

Still, one of the biggest headaches for Creelman and many others is the containers in which beverages are packaged — in this case, cans.

"Like everyone else, we're scratching and clawing for as much as we can get," he said.

Nearly 75 percent of all new beverages launched this year were packaged in aluminum cans, compared to 30 to 40 percent of beverages over the last five years, so more companies are fighting for a limited supply, Credit Suisse equity analyst Curt Woodworth wrote in an analyst report on the aluminum industry. Cans

are sold out in North America over the next 24 to 36 months, and supply may not catch up to demand until 2025 or 2026, he wrote.

While beverage producers are struggling with all of these issues, it's grocery store owners and workers who have to explain the empty shelves to customers.

"We are seeing waves of products out of stock, then back in stock, while other products are just out of stock," said Cullen Gilchrist, chief executive of Union Kitchen in Washington, D.C. "Sometimes it's sizes or formats — bottles versus cans, glass versus plastic — that are out of stock, or just some flavors."

The challenge, Gilchrist said, is how to arrange the shelves and plan the layout of store aisles when it's not clear what is going to show up. He said he's seen between 25 and 50 percent of orders not coming in, or coming in short, which forces his staff to hustle to rearrange and close up those gaps.

To avoid supply shortages, some companies are trying to get creative. Casamara Club, a small nonalcoholic "leisure soda" company in Detroit, has been stymied in getting drinks out the door because of delayed deliveries of glass bottles from China, said founder Jason LaValla. Now he is in the process of moving some of his beverages from glass bottles to cans.

"Our last bottling delay caused us to go out of stock for a full month," LaValla said. "That's a whole month of lost sales, and if you add that up, we are probably down about 15 percent in revenue because of not being able to fill orders."

Glass shortages and delays, coupled with ingredient shortages and more delays, have meant that Casamara Club has had to raid their marketing budget to spend more on stockpiling ingredients like chinotto extract, an Italian citrus, for fear of running out and not being able to make drinks like their Amaro club soda.

Scott Harris at Catoctin Creek Distilling in Virginia has had a similar experience. One of his two main rye whiskey bottle types has disappeared. Plus, it has taken as long as five months to get corks from Portugal, so they've had to make do with an emergency purchase of plastic corks.

Tonya Donato, co-founder of Mother Kombucha in St. Petersburg, Fla., said she's also struggled with the same supply chain problems as other beverage companies with a lack of bottles and cans, ingredients going missing or needing more lead time and not enough truckers.

But she also sees an upside in the beverage aisle, for new or smaller companies like hers. She's been able to sell more turmeric ginger lemonade kombucha, seizing on an opportunity to fill "humongous holes" in grocery store shelves.

"I've seen smaller beverage brands on LinkedIn saying, 'Hey, if you're a grocery category manager and you have holes on your shelves, call us,' " she said. "Because so many big beverage companies can't keep product on the shelves — I'm talking major brands like Topo Chico and Perrier — we've gotten more orders and been able to expand into more stores."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	12/08 Mayor's email on CHOP shooting surfaces
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/after-deadly-shooting-in-protest-zone-seattle-mayor-jenny-durkan-called-situation-foreseeable-and-avoidable-email-shows/
GIST	<p>Hours after a 19-year-old man was fatally shot last year inside a nationally watched protest zone on Seattle's Capitol Hill, Mayor Jenny Durkan urged her police and fire chiefs to come up with new plans for responding to the area and described the situation as "foreseeable and avoidable," an email that recently surfaced in an ongoing lawsuit shows.</p> <p>"I know this has been a very difficult time for each of you," Durkan wrote in the email, sent to then-Police Chief Carmen Best and Fire Chief Harold Scoggins at 8:54 a.m. on June 20, 2020, about the overnight</p>

shooting. "... But as we discussed at the outset of the Cap Hill issues, and as you told the public, there can be no part of the city where SFD and SPD do not respond.

"What happened this am was foreseeable and avoidable. It cannot be repeated."

The mayor's email, recently disclosed in response to records requests made by the law firm representing the mother of shooting victim Lorenzo Anderson, gives a more blunt assessment than what Durkan and other city officials [later publicly conveyed](#) about the first fatal shooting inside the six-block Capitol Hill Organized Protest zone, known as CHOP.

It's also one of several revelations about what went on behind the scenes in the mayor's administration during last year's racial justice protests — revelations emerging in the final weeks of Durkan's tenure during a slew of ongoing litigation against the city.

A recent filing in another lawsuit contends Durkan was actively considering a plan to vacate the police department's East Precinct and hand the building over to Black Lives Matter activists around the time Seattle [police commanders opted to evacuate](#) the station.

Such new details have surfaced just as legal discovery in litigation against the city has been complicated by the disappearance of potentially key evidence: [text messages](#) that Durkan, Best, Scoggins and several other city officials exchanged during a crucial period of last year's civil unrest.

Many of the missing texts, which City Attorney Pete Holmes' office has [acknowledged were automatically deleted, purged or otherwise lost](#), covered periods overlapping with June 2020, when police used tear gas on protest crowds and abandoned the precinct, and when the first of two fatal shootings occurred in the CHOP zone that had been ceded to protesters.

Durkan's email about Anderson's death bolsters the claims of the dead man's mother, Donnitta Sinclair, according to her lawyer, Mark Lindquist.

Last month, [a judge dismissed Sinclair's federal lawsuit](#) that alleged the city's abandonment of the precinct, coupled with its first responders' failure to assist Anderson after he was shot, amounted to state-created "lawlessness and ... a foreseeable danger." U.S. District Judge John Coughenour concluded Sinclair hadn't provided sufficient evidence to support her allegations that the city's actions created danger particular to Anderson and that the city was "deliberately indifferent" to that danger.

Sinclair has since appealed the dismissal.

Durkan's email, which had yet to be obtained when Sinclair filed her federal suit, "goes right to the heart of the key element of our allegations — that this shooting and the city's botched response to it were foreseeable," Lindquist said. Coughenour didn't rule on whether Anderson's shooting could be considered foreseeable, nor did the city contest that point when asking for the suit to be dismissed.

"I appreciate her candor and honesty" in the email, added Lindquist, formerly the elected prosecutor of Pierce County. "In my old job, I would call that a confession."

A spokesperson for Durkan referred questions to Holmes' office.

Dan Nolte, a spokesman for Holmes, said in an email: "Rather than explain errors and mischaracterizations in the press, the City expects to litigate its cases in court."

Precinct transfer

A recent filing in the other federal lawsuit — [a proposed class action](#) alleging the city's tolerance of CHOP and its decision to pull police from the area cost more than a dozen Capitol Hill businesses and residents millions of dollars and violated their rights to live and operate safely — contends Durkan's office initially planned to "gift the East Precinct itself to BLM," before considering other properties.

The filing by the plaintiffs' attorneys, the Calfo Eakes law firm, largely bases the contention on a city "draft resolution" to move out of the East Precinct and the Oct. 12 deposition of former Deputy Mayor Casey Sixkiller. The draft resolution hasn't been publicly released.

During the deposition, Sixkiller acknowledged Durkan was considering the idea of handing over the precinct and recalled "expressing to her that while she may have a strong desire to put this on the table as a conversation point with folks, that it's not ready," according to a transcript.

Sixkiller called the timing of Durkan's considerations to transfer the precinct — at about the same time police commanders decided to evacuate the building — "purely coincidental." He said the discussion was in its early stages, adding the idea was dropped after BLM activists told city officials they didn't want the precinct, the transcript shows.

About two weeks after Sixkiller's deposition, Durkan's chief of staff, Stephanie Formas, disputed a statement in [a book recently published by Best](#) in which the former chief wrote that BLM activists told her "someone in the mayor's office had offered them the keys" to the East Precinct.

"Did someone tell Carmen that we did – possibly," Formas wrote in an email to The Seattle Times, "but I can definitely confirm no one was offered keys or the building!"

Formas also downplayed that Durkan's office seriously considered such a plan, saying the idea emerged from "a few demand letters to hand over the building" and Councilmember Kshama Sawant's commitment to draft legislation about the issue.

"[W]e did have conversations about [the] building, community room, buildings nearby, city buildings in the area, that could meet the spirit of transferring property to the black community (and we [did transfer a few properties last year](#))," Formas said in her email.

Neither Sixkiller's deposition nor the recent court filing say which activists were engaged in discussions about the precinct.

A June 15, 2020, letter from the organization Black Lives Matter Seattle King County to Durkan and other leaders, obtained by The Seattle Times through a records request, demanded that the precinct be ceded to the organization as part of a process to repurpose the building with Public Health – Seattle & King County for community needs.

"This one leaped out"

Durkan's email about the first CHOP shooting didn't surface during legal discovery but instead through public records requests that Lindquist said his firm filed separately with the mayor's office, police and fire departments, seeking emails exchanged among Durkan, Best and Scoggins.

"We got some other records, but this is the one that leaped out," Lindquist said of the email. "Jenny is not only an attorney, but an experienced attorney. She knows what 'foreseeable and avoidable' means both in common sense and in the legal sense."

Lindquist said he expects the email from Durkan, a former U.S. attorney, will be "persuasive evidence" to help prove the city's culpability in a [lawsuit in King County Superior Court](#) filed on behalf of Anderson's estate, which includes his mother as a beneficiary, as well as in her separate federal claims should they survive the appeal. "Foreseeability" is one of the legal elements Sinclair would need to prove in her federal claims that the city's tolerance and lack of policing of CHOP amounted to a state-created danger, Lindquist said.

The city has yet to provide the email in response to two similar requests for her communications and those of police officials communications about the CHOP shooting, made 17 months ago by The Seattle Times.

The Times has since sued the city over the way Durkan's office and other city departments have handled requests related to her missing texts and other records related to last year's demonstrations.

When the city won pretrial dismissal of Sinclair's federal suit in November, its lawyers noted they were prepared to argue the city could not have foreseen that Anderson would run into 18-year-old Marcel Long the morning he was shot. Bad blood between the two men allegedly led Long to shoot Anderson on the sidewalk across the street from Cal Anderson Park, according to police.

Long has been [charged with first-degree murder](#).

Police officers and fire department medics weren't able to reach the shooting scene because of unsafe conditions, city officials have said. Anderson, and another man who was shot and wounded, were taken to Harborview Medical Center by private citizens, while fire medics waited outside the protest zone, citing the standard policy of waiting for police to secure potentially dangerous areas before entering.

Police also said the officers who tried to access CHOP were met by a hostile crowd and left for safety reasons. Sinclair's lawsuit argues any crowd hostility toward police stemmed from their failure to respond to the shooting scene.

In her email about 6 1/2 hours later, Durkan, who noted Best was out of town at the time of the shooting, instructed the police and fire chiefs "to develop true operational plan[s] so we do not get a repeat of that again."

Durkan didn't reiterate the "foreseeable and avoidable" language from her email during a news conference that she, Best, Scoggins and others held to address Anderson's fatal shooting two days later. By then, [a second shooting had occurred inside CHOP](#) that wounded a 17-year-old.

Instead, the mayor cited "escalating violence" and safety concerns during the CHOP's "nighttime atmosphere," as well as gun violence locally and nationally, as concerns that needed to be addressed.

"The city will not allow for gun violence to continue in the evenings around Capitol Hill," she said. "And if individuals continue to remain at the park we will be looking at additional steps to ensure community safety."

Best, meantime, blamed the City Council for approving a measure to ban police use of certain crowd-control weapons for impeding officers' ability to potentially help Anderson.

"A life might have been saved if not for the circumstances created by hasty legislation," Best said.

But the council's ban hadn't taken effect when Anderson was shot.

When a reporter later questioned officials about the chief's statement, Durkan responded: "I didn't imply that he could be saved, I said it's very tragic that he died. I don't think anyone was contradicting what the facts are, but it's a bigger existential issue. We have to stop the gun violence everywhere in Seattle."

Two days after [another shooting in CHOP on June 29](#) killed 16-year-old Antonio Mays Jr. and wounded a 14-year-old boy, Durkan ordered [police to clear](#) the protest zone.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	12/08 Cases spike amid 200M vaccine milestone
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/covid-cases-spike-us-reaches-vaccine-milestone-81628242
GIST	PROVIDENCE, R.I. -- The number of Americans fully vaccinated against COVID-19 reached 200 million Wednesday amid a dispiriting holiday-season spike in cases and hospitalizations that has hit even New England, one of the most highly inoculated corners of the country.

New cases in the U.S. climbed from an average of nearly 95,000 a day on Nov. 22 to almost 119,000 a day this week, and hospitalizations are up 25% from a month ago. The increases are due almost entirely to the delta variant, though the omicron mutation has been detected in about 20 states and is sure to spread even more.

Deaths are running close to 1,600 a day on average, back up to where they were in October. And the overall U.S. death toll less than two years into the crisis could hit another heartbreaking milestone, 800,000, in a matter of days.

The situation is not as dire as last year's holiday-season surge, before the public had access to COVID-19 vaccines, but the 60% of the U.S. population that is fully vaccinated has not been enough to prevent hot spots.

The cold weather, Thanksgiving gatherings and a big rebound in holiday travel are all believed to be playing a role, along with public weariness with pandemic restrictions.

Lawrence Gostin, director of the WHO Collaborating Center on Public Health Law and Human Rights at Georgetown University, likened the virus to a wildfire.

"You can clear a forest of the shrubbery. But if you leave some shrubs and trees standing, the fire will find them," Gostin said. "The virus will find you. It is searching for hosts that are not immune. The fact that you live in New England or New York doesn't insulate you."

Demand for the vaccine — with recent approval of boosters for all adults and shots for elementary school children — has been high amid the surge and the emergence of the omicron variant, whose dangers are still not fully understood. On Wednesday, Pfizer said that the initial two shots of its vaccine appear significantly less effective against omicron but that a booster dose may offer important protection.

Nearly 48 million people have received a booster, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. White House officials noted the U.S. administered 12.5 million shots last week, the highest weekly total since May.

"And that's critical progress as we head into the winter and confront the new omicron variant," White House coronavirus adviser Jeffrey Zients said.

At the same time, some states, notably in highly vaccinated New England, but also in the Midwest, are grappling with some of the worst surges since the start of the pandemic. Hospitals are filling up and reacting by canceling non-urgent surgeries or taking other crisis measures, while states are strongly promoting boosters.

Despite one of the highest vaccination levels in the country — over 74% of the population fully vaccinated — Vermont is coping with its biggest surge yet. In the last week, new cases per day are up 54%, and the number of people in the hospital with COVID-19 has climbed 18%.

The virus is preying on those who haven't gotten their shots: As of Tuesday, 90% of the COVID-19 patients in intensive care were unvaccinated.

"Obviously, it's not where we want to be," Gov. Phil Scott said Tuesday, calling the situation "extremely frustrating."

More than 400 people were in the hospital with COVID-19 in New Hampshire at the start of the week, breaking the record set last winter.

New Hampshire Gov. Chris Sununu directed hospitals to set up COVID-19 "surge centers" using space normally reserved for such things as outpatient care.

“Every day for the next several weeks, we’re likely to see a new high in COVID hospitalizations in New Hampshire,” said Steve Ahnen, president of the New Hampshire Hospital Association. “With over 1,000 new cases a day, that number’s not going to do anything but continue to go up.”

Maine likewise is struggling with record-breaking COVID-19 hospitalizations. Gov. Janet Mills on Wednesday activated as many as 75 members of the National Guard to help out.

“The vast majority of patients in our hospitals are unvaccinated. That’s especially true of critical care patients,” said Andy Mueller, CEO of MaineHealth, the state’s biggest health network. “It requires a tremendous amount of our resources to provide care.”

Rhode Island’s largest hospital system, Lifespan, said staffing shortages are at never-before-seen crisis levels, while Kent Hospital said it is near capacity and is considering delaying non-urgent procedures.

Dr. Paari Gopalakrishnan, Kent’s interim president and chief operating officer, said the spike is probably due to “people letting their guards down” during the holidays, and flu season could complicate things further.

New Hampshire plans to hold a “booster blitz” on Saturday at 15 locations. Most appointments were booked.

In Berlin, Vermont, Mike Labounty got his booster Tuesday.

"I have friends that are in their 20s that are getting sick and friends that are 60 that are getting sick," he said. "The thing you see on Facebook and stuff like that is, 'I just want this to be over. I'm very sick,' so I'm just trying to avoid that."

Elsewhere around the country, Indiana has seen COVID-19 hospital admissions double in the last month and is approaching levels not seen since this time a year ago, before vaccines were widely available.

The number of people in intensive care in Minnesota has reached the highest level yet during the pandemic, with 98% of ICU beds occupied. Teams of military medics have been sent into Michigan and New Mexico.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	12/08 Myanmar troops burn alive 11 in retaliation
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/reports-myanmar-troops-burn-alive-11-retaliation-attack-81644966
GIST	<p>BANGKOK -- Myanmar government troops raided a small northwestern village, rounding up civilians, binding their hands and then burning them alive in apparent retaliation for an attack on a military convoy, according to witnesses and other reports.</p> <p>A video of the aftermath of Tuesday's attack showed the charred bodies of 11 victims, some believed to be teenagers, lying in a circle amid what appeared to be the remains of a hut in Done Taw village in Sagaing region.</p> <p>Outrage spread as the graphic images were shared on social media over what appeared to be the latest of increasingly brutal military attacks in an attempt to put down stiffening anti-government resistance following the army takeover in February.</p> <p>Human Rights Watch called Thursday for the international community to ensure that commanders who gave the order are added to targeted sanctions lists, and more broadly, efforts are stepped up to cut off any source of funding to the military.</p>

“Our contacts are saying these were just boys and young people who were villagers who were caught in the wrong place at the wrong time,” a spokeswoman for the group, Manny Maung, said.

She added that similar incidents have been occurring regularly, but that this one happened to be caught on camera.

“This incident is quite brazen, and it happened in an area that was meant to be found, and seen, to scare people,” she said.

The images could not be independently verified, but an account given to The Associated Press by a person who said he was present when they were taken generally matched descriptions of the incident carried by independent Myanmar media.

The government has denied that it had any troops in the area.

The military ouster of the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi was initially met with nonviolent street protests, but after police and soldiers responded with lethal force, violence escalated as opponents of military rule took up arms in self-defense.

The killings in Done Taw were decried by Myanmar’s underground National Unity Government, which has established itself as the country’s alternative administration in place of the military-installed government.

The organization’s spokesperson, Dr. Sasa, said a military convoy had been hit by a roadside bomb and troops retaliated first by shelling Done Taw, then assaulting the village, rounding up anyone they could capture.

He said victims ranged in age from 14 to 40.

“Sickening scenes reminiscent of the Islamic State terrorist group bore witness to the the military’s escalation of their acts of terror,” he said in a statement.

“The sheer brutality, savagery, and cruelty of these acts shows a new depth of depravity, and proves that despite the pretense of the relative détente seen over the last few months, the junta never had any intention of deescalating their campaign of violence,” said Sasa, who uses one name.

The witness who spoke to the AP said about 50 troops marched into Done Taw village at about 11 a.m. Tuesday, seizing anyone who did not manage to flee.

“They arrested 11 innocent villagers,” said the witness, who described himself as a farmer and an activist and asked to remain anonymous for his own safety,

He added that the captured men were not members of the locally organized People’s Defense Force, which sometimes engages the army in combat. He said the captives had their hands tied behind them and were set on fire.

He did not give a reason for the soldiers' assault.

Other witnesses cited in Myanmar media said the victims were members of a defense force, though the witness who spoke to the AP described them as members of a less formally organized village protection group.

In recent months, fighting has been raging in Sagaing and other northwestern areas, where the army has unleashed greater force against the resistance than in urban centers.

U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric expressed deep concern at the reports of the "horrific killing of 11 people" and strongly condemned such violence, saying "credible reports indicate that five children were among those people killed."

Dujarric reminded Myanmar's military authorities of their obligations under international law to ensure the safety and protection of civilians and called for those responsible "for this heinous act" to be held accountable.

He reiterated the U.N.'s condemnation of violence by Myanmar's security forces and stressed that this demands a unified international response. As of Wednesday, he said security forces have killed more than 1,300 unarmed individuals, including more than 75 children, through their use of lethal force or while in their custody since the military takeover on Feb. 1.

The allegations follow Monday's conviction of Suu Kyi on charges of incitement and violating coronavirus restrictions and sentencing to four years in prison, which was quickly cut in half. The court's action was widely criticized as a further effort by military rulers to roll back the democratic gains of recent years.

In New York, the U.N. Security Council on Wednesday expressed "deep concern" at the sentencing of Suu Kyi, ousted President Win Myint and others and reiterated previous calls for the release of all those arbitrarily detained.

"The members of the Security Council once again stressed their continued support for the democratic transition in Myanmar, and underlined the need to uphold democratic institutions and processes, refrain from violence, pursue constructive dialogue and reconciliation in accordance with the will and interests of the people of Myanmar, fully respect human rights and fundamental freedoms and uphold the rule of law," a council statement said.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	12/08 New Covid-19 antibody drug authorized
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Business/wireStory/us-oks-covid-19-antibody-drug-high-risk-81635406
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON -- Federal health officials on Wednesday authorized a new COVID-19 antibody drug for people with serious health problems or allergies who can't get adequate protection from vaccination.</p> <p>Antibody drugs have been a standard treatment for treating COVID-19 infections for over a year. But the AstraZeneca antibody drug cleared by the Food and Drug Administration is different. It's the first intended for long-term prevention against COVID-19 infection, rather than a short-term treatment.</p> <p>People who could benefit from the antibody drug include cancer patients, organ transplant recipients and people taking immune-suppressing drugs for conditions like rheumatoid arthritis. Health experts estimate about 2% to 3% of the U.S. population falls into that group.</p> <p>"These people still have to shelter in place because they're at really high risk of severe disease and death," said Dr. David Boulware of the University of Minnesota, ahead of the announcement. "So having this therapy will enable a lot of them to get back to their normal lives."</p> <p>Specifically, the FDA authorized the AstraZeneca drug called Evusheld for adults and children 12 and older whose immune systems haven't responded adequately to COVID-19 vaccines or have a history of severe allergic reactions to the shots. Regulators said the required two antibody injections may be effective at preventing COVID-19 infections for six months.</p> <p>Like similar drugs, AstraZeneca's delivers laboratory-made versions of human antibody proteins, which help the immune system fight off viruses and other infections.</p> <p>The FDA and other health authorities have stressed that antibody drugs are not a substitute for vaccines, which are the most effective, long-lasting and economical form of virus protection. Antibody drugs are</p>

tricky to manufacture and often cost more than \$1,000 per dose compared with vaccines that are typically under \$30 per shot.

The FDA has authorized three other antibody therapies from Regeneron, Eli Lilly and GlaxoSmithKline, with the U.S. government purchasing hundreds of thousands of doses. All require an IV or injection. They are used to treat people with recent infections who have the highest risk of progressing to severe COVID-19 because of other health issues. Two can be used to prevent infection after a possible coronavirus exposure.

AstraZeneca's drug would be used differently— only as a long-term preventive measure in people who have increased vulnerability to the virus.

In a company study, people who received Evusheld had a 77% lower risk of infection than people who received a dummy shot over six months, the FDA said.

[Return to Top](#)

Cyber Awareness

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	12/08 What caused Amazon Web Service outage?
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/explainer-what-caused-amazons-outage-will-there-be-more/
GIST	<p>Robotic vacuum cleaners wouldn't start. Doorbell cameras stopped watching for package thieves, though some of those deliveries were canceled anyway. Netflix and Disney movies got interrupted and The Associated Press had trouble publishing the news.</p> <p>A major outage in Amazon's cloud computing network Tuesday severely disrupted services at a wide range of U.S. companies for hours, raising questions about the vulnerability of the internet and its concentration in the hands of a few firms.</p> <p>How did it happen?</p> <p>Amazon has still said nothing about what, exactly, went wrong. The company limited its communications Tuesday to terse technical explanations on an Amazon Web Services dashboard and a brief statement delivered via spokesperson Richard Rocha that acknowledged the outage had affected Amazon's own warehouse and delivery operations but said the company was "working to resolve the issue as quickly as possible." It didn't immediately respond to further questions Wednesday.</p> <p>The incident at Amazon Web Services mostly affected the eastern U.S., but still affected everything from airline reservations and auto dealerships to payment apps and video streaming services to Amazon's own massive e-commerce operation.</p> <p>What is AWS?</p> <p>Amazon Web Services is a cloud-service operation — it stores its customers' data, runs their online activities and more — and a huge profit center for Amazon. It holds roughly 40% of the \$64 billion global cloud infrastructure market, a larger share than its closest rivals Microsoft, Alibaba and Google combined, according to research firm Gartner.</p> <p>It was formerly run by Amazon CEO Andy Jassy, who succeeded founder Jeff Bezos in July.</p> <p>Some cybersecurity experts have warned for years about the potentially ugly consequences of allowing a handful of big tech companies to dominate key internet operations.</p> <p>"The latest AWS outage is a prime example of the danger of centralized network infrastructure," said Sean O'Brien, a visiting lecturer in cybersecurity at Yale Law School. "Though most people browsing the internet or using an app don't know it, Amazon is baked into most of the apps and websites they use each day." O'Brien said it's important to build a new network model that resembles the peer-to-peer roots of the</p>

early internet. Big outages have already knocked huge swaths of the world offline, as happened during an October Facebook incident.

Even under the current model, companies do have some options to split their services between different cloud providers, although it can be complicated, or to at least make sure they can move their services to a different region run by the same provider. Tuesday's outage mostly affected Amazon's "US East 1" region.

"Which means if you had critical systems only available in that region, you were in trouble," said Servaas Verbiest, lead cloud evangelist at Sungard Availability Services. "If you heavily embraced the AWS ecosystem and are locked into using solely their services and functions, you must ensure you balance your workloads between regions."

Hasn't this happened before?

Yes. The last major AWS outage was in November 2020. There have been numerous other disruptive and lengthy internet outages involving other providers. In June, the behind-the-scenes content distributor Fastly suffered a failure that briefly took down dozens of major internet sites including CNN, The New York Times and Britain's government home page. Another that month affected provider Akamai during peak business hours in Asia in June.

In the October outage, Facebook — now known as Meta Platforms — blamed a "faulty configuration change" for an hourslong worldwide outage that took down Instagram and WhatsApp in addition to its titular platform.

It was unclear how, or whether, Tuesday's outage affected governments, but many of them also rely on Amazon and its rivals.

Among the most influential organizations to rethink its approach of depending on a single cloud provider was the Pentagon, which in July canceled a disputed cloud-computing contract with Microsoft that could eventually have been worth \$10 billion. It will instead pursue a deal with both Microsoft and Amazon and possibly other cloud service providers such as Google, Oracle and IBM.

The National Security Agency earlier this year awarded Amazon a contract with a potential estimated value of \$10 billion to be the sole manager of the NSA's own migration to cloud computing. The contract is known by its agency code name "Wild and Stormy." The Government Accountability Office in October sustained a bid protest by Microsoft, finding that certain parts of the NSA's decision were "unreasonable," although the full decision is classified.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	12/08 'Burnout' becomes security nightmare
SOURCE	https://www.zdnet.com/article/everyone-is-burned-out-thats-becoming-a-security-nightmare/
GIST	<p>Cybersecurity workers and other employees are suffering from a high level of burnout that is putting organisations at greater risks from cyberattacks and data breaches.</p> <p>Research by cybersecurity company 1Password suggests that the challenge of remote working two years into the COVID-19 pandemic is leaving staff feeling burned out and less likely to pay attention to security guidelines.</p> <p>According to the survey, burned-out employees are more apathetic about workplace cybersecurity measures and are three times more likely to ignore suggested best practices.</p> <p>Risky behaviours include downloading software and apps without IT's express permission, and thus increasing the amount of shadow IT on networks that's difficult for the IT department to properly manage. There's also the risk that these employees could download fake or malicious versions of apps, which could potentially deliver malware and other threats from hackers.</p>

The paper also warns that burned-out employees are much more likely to use [easy-to-guess passwords](#) to secure their corporate accounts. The use of weak passwords makes it much easier for cyber criminals to breach accounts and use that access to snoop around the network, steal information and lay down the foundation for wider malicious activity.

"The biggest threat is internal apathy. When people don't use security protocols properly, they leave our company vulnerable," said one unnamed cybersecurity professional cited in the report.

In many organisations, it's cybersecurity staff who are there to counter activity that could make the network vulnerable to cyberattacks – but according to the paper, cybersecurity professionals are more burned out than other workers. The research suggests that 84% of [security professionals are feeling burned out](#), compared with 80% of other workers.

And when cybersecurity employees are burned out, they're more than likely to describe themselves as "completely checked out" and "doing the bare minimum at work" – something that one in 10 cybersecurity professionals described as their state of mind compared with one in 20 of other employees.

That attitude could easily result in security threats being missed or flaws not being fixed in time, something that could put the whole company at risk from cyber incidents.

"Pandemic-fueled burnout – and resultant workplace apathy and distraction – has emerged as the next significant security risk," said Jeff Shiner, chief executive officer at 1Password. "It's particularly surprising to find that burned-out security leaders, charged with protecting businesses, are doing a far worse job of following security guidelines – and putting companies at risk".

The rise of remote and/or hybrid working has changed many workplaces in a permanent way and it's vital that the correct cybersecurity strategies are put in place to manage risk.

Additionally, managers need to talk to employees about the challenges working from home can bring in addition to the benefits – therefore, gaining a better understanding over why burnout happens and what can be done to counter both burnout and the associated security risks.

"It's now a business imperative for companies to engage the humans at the heart of security operations with tools, training and ongoing support to create a culture of security and care that helps us all stay safe at work," said Shiner.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	12/08 Emotet piggybacking on TrickBot
SOURCE	https://thehackernews.com/2021/12/140000-reasons-why-emotet-is.html
GIST	<p>The operators of TrickBot malware have infected an estimated 140,000 victims across 149 countries a little over a year after attempts were to dismantle its infrastructure, even as the advanced Trojan is fast becoming an entry point for Emotet, another botnet that was taken down at the start of 2021.</p> <p>Most of the victims detected since November 1, 2020, are from Portugal (18%), the U.S. (14%), and India (5%), followed by Brazil (4%), Turkey (3%), Russia (3%), and China (3%), Check Point Research noted in a report shared with The Hacker News, with government, finance, and manufacturing entities emerging the top affected industry verticals.</p> <p>"Emotet is a strong indicator of future ransomware attacks, as the malware provides ransomware gangs a backdoor into compromised machines," said the researchers, who detected 223 different Trickbot campaigns over the course of the last six months.</p> <p>Both TrickBot and Emotet are botnets, which are a network of internet-connected devices infected by malware and can be tasked to conduct an array of malicious activities. TrickBot originated as a C++ banking Trojan and as a successor of Dyre malware in 2016, featuring capabilities to steal financial</p>

details, account credentials and other sensitive information; laterally spread across a network; and drop additional payloads, including Conti, [Diavol](#), and Ryuk ransomware strains.

Disseminated via malspam campaigns or previously dropped by other malware like Emotet, [TrickBot](#) is believed to be the handiwork of a Russia-based group called [Wizard Spider](#) and has since extended its capabilities to create a complete modular malware ecosystem, making it an adaptable and evolving threat, not to mention an attractive tool for conducting a myriad of illegal cyber activities.

The botnet also caught the attention of government and private entities late last year, when the U.S. Cyber Command and a group of private sector partners spearheaded by Microsoft, ESET, and Symantec [acted to blunt TrickBot's reach](#) and prevent the adversary from purchasing or leasing servers for command-and-control operations.

Emotet comes back with new tricks

But these actions have only been [temporary setbacks](#), with the malware authors [rolling out updates](#) to the botnet code that have made it more resilient and suitable for mounting further attacks. What's more, TrickBot infections in November and December have also propelled a surge in [Emotet malware](#) on compromised machines, signaling a revival of the infamous botnet after a gap of 10 months following a [coordinated law enforcement effort](#) to [disrupt](#) its spread.

"Emotet could not choose a better platform than Trickbot as a delivery service when it came to its rebirth," the researchers noted.

The latest [wave](#) of [spam attacks](#) prompts users to download password-protected ZIP archive files, which contain malicious documents that, once opened and macros are enabled, result in the deployment of Emotet malware, thereby enabling it to rebuild its botnet network and grow in volume.

"Emotet's comeback is a major warning sign for yet another surge in ransomware attacks as we go into 2022," said Lotem Finkelstein, Check Point's head of threat intelligence. "Trickbot, who has always collaborated with Emotet, is facilitating Emotet's comeback by dropping it on infected victims. This has allowed Emotet to start from a very firm position, and not from scratch."

That's not all. In what appears to be a further escalation in tactics, new Emotet artifacts have been uncovered dropping Cobalt Strike beacons directly onto compromised systems, according to [Cryptolaemus](#) cybersecurity experts, as opposed to dropping first-stage payloads before installing the post-exploitation tool.

"This is a big deal. Typically Emotet dropped TrickBot or QakBot, which in turn dropped Cobalt Strike. You'd usually have about a month between [the] first infection and ransomware. With Emotet dropping [Cobalt Strike] directly, there's likely to be a much much shorter delay," security researcher Marcus Hutchins [tweeted](#).

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	12/08 Deepfakes widen fraud opportunities
SOURCE	https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/cybercrime/deepfakes-widen-fraud-opportunities-for-financial-hackers
GIST	<p>Cyber-thieves are learning to “fake it till they make it,” much to the chagrin of the financial service institutions who are falling prey to this latest spate of scams.</p> <p>So-called “deepfakes” — where fraudsters use various technologies to skillfully mimic video, pictures or voices of other people — have captured popular attention, with deepfake videos emerging of celebrities and politicians being convincingly portrayed as doing and saying things they never have. Unlike hoaxes of the past, fraudsters are now utilizing more advanced technologies, including artificial intelligence, to create deepfakes so realistic and seamless that it has become a real challenge for even the most skilled cybersecurity professional to spot the deception.</p>

According to Nick Santora, CEO of security awareness training platform Curricula, while we're only beginning to see the emergence of deepfakes in finance, "it's not outlandish to think that it will be used in ways for cyberattacks that we're not even expecting right now."

"The threat of voice and visual deep fakes will continue to increase as the tools for these hackers become more widely used and readily available, said Santora. "Today, there's no technology readily available for smaller financial services institutions, as well as consumers, to help prevent them being duped from these scams."

While deepfakes have already been used for a host of nefarious purposes — from creating hoax pornographic videos to fake news and other misleading images and commentary — these fabrications are quickly becoming fodder for cyber-thieves looking to steal money and data from FSIs. Using AI, black-hat hackers earlier this year created a [voice simulation](#) of an executive at a prominent bank in the United Arab Emirates and, in combination with phony emails, convinced bank personnel to release \$35 million to them. (Two of the accounts through which the stolen funds were funneled were actually with a U.S. bank; hence, U.S. FSIs and regulators are following this case quite keenly.)

Deepfakes are not a new development. Going back at least two years, skillful scammers have been using deepfakes — particularly in tandem with phishing, fake news and social media accounts and other fraud techniques — to perpetrate business email compromise. (In March 2019, cybercriminals were able to copy the voice of a [U.K. energy company CEO](#) to rip off nearly a quarter of a million dollars.) While AI and subsequently deepfake technology continues to improve, these scams are getting more difficult to spot, and the heists are getting larger, too.

"As deepfake accuracy improves and as the tools to make them get better, they could become a real problem in the future," said Roger Grimes, data-driven defense evangelist for KnowBe4, a security training firm. "People are pretty easy in general to socially engineer into doing the wrong thing." Used in tandem with convincing phishing emails or duped phone numbers, these scams are quite persuasive.

Where deepfakes can be more dangerous is when the authentication process is more automated and humans are taken out of the equation, said Andrew Howard, CEO of Kudelski Security. If an organization uses a vulnerable service for authentication, an attacker could use compromised facial recognition, for example, to carry out attack on multiple locations, said Howard. Including content about deepfakes in training and creating additional verifications steps of high-value transactions could aid in mitigating such attacks, he added.

In January 2021, CyberCube, a cyber risk analytics firm tracking the insurance industry, released a report saying that due to exponential improvements in using AI to create realistic-looking video and audio fakes — and businesses' growing dependence on using phone, email and video to connect internally and externally — deepfakes will be "a major cyber threat to businesses within the next two years." New enhancements are continually being developed that make these digital fakes more plausible.

For example, developers at the University of Washington recently introduced a new technology called "mouth mapping," where the movement of the mouth is very accurately made to look as though the person is actually saying what the voice simulation has them saying, according to CyberCube.

"As the availability of personal information increases online, criminals are investing in technology to exploit this trend," said Darren Thomson, CyberCube's head of cyber security strategy and the report author, in a prepared release.

"New and emerging social engineering techniques like deepfake video and audio will fundamentally change the cyber threat landscape and are becoming both technically feasible and economically viable for criminal organizations of all sizes."

David Blaszkowsky, head of strategy and regulatory affairs for Helios Data, said deep fakes are really a “worst-case scenario, because nearly any protection dependent on visual or audio metrics can be cracked because they can be, in fact, perfect beyond any margin of error.”

“Fingerprints? Retinal scans? One by one, all the ‘unique’ metrics that protect access to data and accounts are being wiped out, like antibiotics against ever-mutating infectious diseases,” Blaszkowsky said. “It has always been easy to fool human gatekeepers, but with deepfakes it is easier than ever to fool the computers, too.”

Thomson said it’s “only a matter of time before criminals apply the same technique to businesses and wealthy private individuals. It could be as simple as a faked voicemail from a senior manager instructing staff to make a fraudulent payment or move funds to an account set up by a hacker.”

“There is no silver bullet that will translate into zero losses,” Thomson said. “Training employees to be prepared for deep fake attacks will also be important.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	12/08 Financial fraudsters new ways scam elderly
SOURCE	https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/cybercrime/financial-fraudsters-find-new-inroads-to-scam-the-elderly
GIST	<p>As the baby boomers continue to move further up in their golden years, cyber thieves are seeing a golden opportunity of their own to defraud these older citizens.</p> <p>Contrary to popular perception, the retiree set is not necessarily without cyber savvy. But, due to a variety of factors, fraudsters are exploiting the insecurities and isolation of the elderly to steal their money and their personal and financial information. Especially now, during the pandemic, older people are more apt to be limited in leaving their homes and are therefore more dependent on phone, text, email and the internet for financial as well as business and personal communications.</p> <p>Michael B. Cohen, global vice president of operations for MyChargeBack, a consumer advocacy group that helps people recover money lost to online scams, says that financial elder fraud has increased dramatically this year, and expects this trend to continue into 2022. “The COVID pandemic-driven surge of online activity – from shopping to banking to education – has been a boon for fraudsters as well,” Cohen adds.</p> <p>In 2020, senior citizens lost more than \$600 million to fraud, according to estimates from MyChargeBack, as “elder fraud continues to break all-time records across almost all categories of fraud,” says Cohen. And that’s a very modest estimate. The FBI estimates that U.S. senior citizens lose more than \$3 billion annually to fraud overall, with schemes that target low-income older adults as well as wealthy seniors.</p> <p>“The older population presents an ideal victim profile to be targeted,” according to Nick Santora, CEO of Curricula, a security training firm.</p> <p>Federal Trade Commission statistics estimate that this year so far online shopping scams rose by a whopping 129%, business imposter scams by 88%, investment scams by 84%, tech-support scams by 55% and sweepstakes and lottery scams by 35%, Cohen points out. And given the relative higher net worth of boomers, fraudsters are often taking them for greater amounts; the FTC found that seniors were losing an average of \$500 to computer tech support scams alone.</p> <p>“Financial services fraud among the elderly is certainly a pressing issue, just like sweepstakes calls and other scams, with the ultimate goal to tap into the financial reserves of a vulnerable population,” says Steve Winterfeld, head of global cybersecurity and edge services for Akamai. Since older people are more likely to have larger savings and investment accounts, own a home, and possess other valuable assets, they are choice targets for wily cybercriminals.</p>

“And for those who are online, it’s no surprise that financial services phishing attacks would be permeating more broadly than other age demographics,” Winterfeld says. As a result many of Akamai’s FSI customers are deploying both technical solutions to mitigate fraud, and launching customer education initiatives to encourage customers not to reuse passwords or click on a link rather go to a company website and log in directly.

Sadly, the [holiday season](#) provides a particularly ripe opportunity for scam artists to ply their trade with senior citizens, who may find themselves cut off from family or friends and vulnerable to a host of digital tricks – from romance and charity scams, to fraudsters who pretend to be with the IRS or the Social Security Administration. “No senior wants to compromise his or her Social Security” benefits, Cohen points out, adding that there are a broad range of Social Security scams currently. In most cases, they feature imposters claiming to be from the Social Security Administration who coerce seniors into handing over their bank account or credit card numbers, by phone, email or via spoofed websites.

“A common scam during the holiday season is asking for donations,” Santora points out. “It’s a prime opportunity for bad actors to prey upon the giving nature of elderly people looking to make a difference.”

Credential stuffing attacks, which are becoming increasingly popular in the financial sector, are commonly deployed this time of year, according to Winterfeld, who says the theft of login and password remains the most common attack on seniors especially. Typically, the victim will receive a “your account has been compromised” communication, enticing them to enter their credentials on a fake login page; oftentimes, the attacks will say there’s an issue with a gift order or package delivery, again leading individuals to enter their information on a fake company or delivery website page, he adds. There were more than 3.4 billion credential stuffing incidents in the financial services sector last year alone, a 45 percent jump over 2019, according to Akamai data.

For FSIs, the best they can do is keep promoting cybersecurity hygiene and awareness to all their customers, and practice their own due diligence — especially when a request can seem suspicious. For example, Cohen points out, since scammers often favor payment by bank wire, FSIs might examine more carefully when senior customers request a bank wire be sent to a beneficiary, especially when that is out of character for the customer’s account.

“The FSI should carefully review who the beneficiary is to ensure that it is someone the client personally knows or, if it purports to be a service provider, that it is a legal entity operating in full compliance with the law,” Cohen said.

MyChargeBack has returned \$20 million to consumers defrauded online via credit, debit and cryptocurrency transactions.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	12/08 Identity fraud: major growth area for crooks
SOURCE	https://www.securityweek.com/identity-fraud-major-growth-area-criminals
GIST	<p>The lockdowns of 2020 led to an increase in online activity. This in turn led to an increase in online identity theft and fraud. The question asked for 2021 is whether 2020 was a temporary spike, or an ongoing change in fraudulent activity.</p> <p>This is the question discussed by Onfido in its Identity Fraud Report 2022, and answered quite simply, “The jump in fraud that was a direct result of COVID-19 appears to be here to stay.” The reason is simple. People may have been forced into more online shopping and remote working, but have liked what they found. That behavior will continue, and so will fraud.</p> <p>Along with the growth in fraud, the practice of fraud has also evolved. Firstly, there has been a notable shift towards weekend activity. This could be because more ‘amateurs’ have been attracted by the opportunities (working during their own weekend), or it could be a growth in more professional fraudsters</p>

launching attacks when IT staff are known to be sparser (just as ransomware attackers take advantage of weekends and holidays). Or it could be both.

Secondly, the most frequently attacked ID document has changed. In 2020, it was the ID card. Now it is the passport. This could be because passports are easier to copy (one-sided) than ID cards (two-sided), but also because passports are still considered to be the most authoritative ID.

The single most common fraudulent document detected by Onfido in 2021 was the Belgium passport. This cannot be viewed in global absolute terms because the figures (as with all such surveys) come from the vendor's own telemetry. They will be high where the vendor has good market penetration and lower elsewhere – and Onfido has strong market coverage in the Benelux countries (along with many other global regions).

Nevertheless, the Belgium passport holds clues to fraudsters' preferences and practices: highest value targets with lowest possible impediments. "Belgium has had very few changes in the design of the data page of the passport since 2008 and this has given fraudsters ample time to learn how to emulate the security elements on this document," Onfido's Dimitrie Dorgan, global senior document specialist, told SecurityWeek.

The biggest growth area in fraudulent documentation is that classified by Onfido as 'medium' fraud. "This year, 46.82% of all document fraud we saw was classed as 'medium'. Compared to last year's figure, that's a 57% increase," notes the report ([PDF download](#)). 'Medium' fraud is described as documents with 'less obvious errors, such as less visibly incorrect fonts, the wrong photo printing technique, or imitated security features.'

This, says Onfido, is indicative of a growth of fraud rings, where organized groups attempt to create 'verified' accounts with fake documents before using them to embark on other types of fraud. The rewards are high. According to an Aite-Novarica report, identity theft losses in the U.S. alone grew from \$502.5 billion in 2019 to \$712.4 billion in 2020.

"Large-scale operations often undertaken by criminal fraud rings have the resources to conduct sophisticated fraud such as deepfakes, 2D and 3D masks. They might also resort to techniques like coercion. Businesses will see fewer of these types of attacks, but they can cause the most damage in the shortest space of time," said Michael Van Gestel, head of global document fraud at Onfido. "By incorporating biometric authentication and other sophisticated identity verification methods, businesses can ensure that no matter how fraudsters try to capitalize on the changing situation, they can significantly lower the risk of fraud to their organization and customers."

Biometric MFA seems particularly successful at preventing ID fraud. Comparatively, the average document fraud rate for 2021 was 5.9%, compared to 1.53% for selfies and 0.17% for videos. "Biometric verification provides more protection against fraud than document verification alone — and a video selfie check provides superior protection over a photo selfie check," explains Sarah Munro, director of biometrics. "The video user experience in itself acts as a natural deterrent against fraud because it's a highly randomized active experience. Given that video spoofs accounted for a fraction of all our video checks, this makes it an excellent security measure for businesses focused on making fraud prevention a priority."

However, it is worth noting that Onfido is beginning to see the use of deepfake AI to generate fake videos and fake audios. There is an arms race between attackers generating better deepfakes, and defenders being better able to detect them.

Another development has been the growth of retail fraud – likely caused by the pandemic-inspired growth in online purchasing. The two traditional primary targets, financial services and professional services, have been displaced by retail fraud. While the former have long been targeted and have evolved sophisticated fraud prevention processes, retail found itself in new territory. "Employees were working remotely, call

centers moved from office to living room, processes had to quickly adapt and change. All this created weakness for fraudsters to exploit,” explains Onfido.

Overall, identity fraud has expanded from a business concern into a national concern. Interpol, with whom Onfido works, commented, “Fraudulent documents open up avenues for serious organized crime, including money laundering and terrorist financing. Consequently, failure to identify fraudulent documents in both real-world and online scenarios poses a threat to the global economy, countries, and their citizens. Increasingly, we have to adapt to the digital use of identity documents, as well as physical. Businesses and governments alike are facing challenges when identifying fraud in this environment.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	12/08 Report: Chinese hackers target SE Asia
SOURCE	https://www.securityweek.com/report-chinese-hackers-targeted-southeast-asian-nations
GIST	<p>Chinese hackers, likely state-sponsored, have been broadly targeting government and private-sector organizations across Southeast Asia, including those closely involved with Beijing on infrastructure development projects, according to a report released Wednesday by a U.S.-based private cybersecurity company.</p> <p>Specific targets included the Thai prime minister’s office and the Thai army, the Indonesian and Philippine navies, Vietnam’s national assembly and the central office of its Communist Party, and Malaysia’s Ministry of Defense, according to the Insikt Group, the threat research division of Massachusetts-based Recorded Future.</p> <p>Insikt said it determined that the high-profile military and government organizations in Southeast Asia had been compromised over the last nine months by hackers using custom malware families such as FunnyDream and Chinoxy. Those custom tools are not publicly available and are used by multiple groups believed to be Chinese state-sponsored, the group said.</p> <p>The targeting also aligns with the political and economic goals of the Chinese government, bolstering the suspicion it is state-sponsored, Insikt said.</p> <p>“We believe this activity is highly likely to be a state actor as the observed long term targeted intrusions into high value government and political targets is consistent with cyberespionage activity, coupled with identified technical links to known Chinese state-sponsored activity,” the company told The Associated Press.</p> <p>China’s Foreign Ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the allegations.</p> <p>In the past, Chinese authorities have consistently denied any form of state-sponsored hacking, instead saying China itself is a major target of cyberattacks.</p> <p>Of the cyber intrusions it tracked, Insikt Group said Malaysia, Indonesia and Vietnam were the top three targeted countries. Also targeted were Myanmar, the Philippines, Laos, Thailand, Singapore and Cambodia.</p> <p>All countries were notified in October of the findings, though it is thought that at least some of the activity is ongoing, the company said.</p> <p>“Throughout 2021, Insikt Group tracked a persistent cyber espionage campaign targeting the prime minister’s offices, military entities, and government departments of rival South China Sea claimants Vietnam, Malaysia, and the Philippines,” the company said. “Additional victims during the same period include organizations in Indonesia and Thailand.”</p> <p>Much of that campaign was attributed to a group being tracked under the temporary identifier of Threat Activity Group 16, or TAG-16, Insikt Group said.</p>

“We also identified evidence suggesting that TAG-16 shares custom capabilities with the (China’s) People’s Liberation Army-linked activity group RedFoxtrot,” the group said.

Overall, Insikt Group said it had identified more than 400 unique servers in Southeast Asia communicating with malware, but it was not clear what information had been compromised.

“Many of the identified incidents spanned several months, so it is highly likely that the respective threat actors maintained long-term access to the victim networks and were able to obtain victim data over this time period in support of intelligence gathering efforts,” Insikt told AP. “At this time, we do not have insight into the specific data obtained by the threat actors.”

Some of the information on Indonesia was disclosed in a previous report from the Insikt Group in September, and Indonesian authorities said at the time they had found no evidence their computers had been compromised.

Insikt Group said the earlier activity directed at Indonesia from malware servers operated by the “Mustang Panda” group gradually stopped in mid-August, following a second notification the company provided to the country’s authorities.

Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesman Teuku Faizasyah said he did not have any information regarding Insikt Group’s new findings that the ministry had also been targeted.

Similarly, Thailand’s army said it had no immediate information that its cybersecurity team had detected any intrusions into its servers.

Col. Ramon Zagala, spokesman for the Philippine armed forces, said the military had not yet seen Insikt’s report but that “it takes all kinds of potential attacks seriously and has measures in place to protect our vital systems.”

Insikt Group said it had also detected activity in Cambodia and Laos believed linked to Beijing’s Belt and Road Initiative to build ports, railways and other facilities across Asia, Africa and the Pacific.

Poorer countries have welcomed the initiative, but some have complained they are left owing too much to Chinese banks.

Just last week, Laos inaugurated a \$5.9 billion Chinese-built railway linking the country with southern China.

“Historically, many Chinese cyber espionage operations have heavily overlapped with projects and countries strategically important to the BRI,” the Insikt Group noted, referring to the Belt and Road Initiative.

Cambodian government spokesman Phay Siphon said the country’s own agencies had not detected any hacking of servers noted by Insikt Group.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	12/08 Software vulnerabilities up 20% in 2021
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/software-vulnerabilities-increase/
GIST	<p>Software vulnerabilities increased by 20% in 2021 compared with 2020, according to a new report by HackerOne.</p> <p>The bug bounty platform said its hackers had uncovered over 66,000 valid vulnerabilities this year, while hacker-powered pentests detected a 264% rise in reported vulnerabilities in 2021 compared to 2020. Additionally, there was a 47% increase in vulnerabilities detected by Vulnerability Disclosure Programs.</p>

The surge in vulnerabilities has partly been driven by the increase in organizations adopting hacker-powered security testing programs, according to the report. For example, there was a 62% increase in financial services programs and an 89% rise in government programs, including a [bug bounty challenge by the UK's Ministry of Defence](#).

HackerOne said another factor is the expansion of attack surfaces brought about by digital transformation and cloud migration during the pandemic.

The most commonly discovered bug was cross site scripting, as it was in 2020. However, there were significant increases in reports of information disclosure (58%) and business logic errors (67%). Of all the vulnerabilities reported, 26% were considered critical, 36% medium severity, and 34% low severity. Encouragingly, the median time to resolution fell by 19%, from 33 days in 2020 to 26.7 days in 2021 across all industries. Retail and e-commerce even saw time-to-remediation drop by more than 50% in this period.

The report also found that the median price of a critical bug rose by 20%, from \$2500 in 2020 to \$3000 in 2021. Additionally, the average bounty price for a critical bug rose by 13% and by 30% for a high severity rated bug this year.

Chris Evans, CISO and chief hacking officer at HackerOne, commented: "Even the most conservative organizations are recognizing the power of the outsider point of view.

"We've continued to see high growth in the financial services sector, for example. Measuring and quantifying risk is their business, and they're seeing that both risk and business outcome is better if they embrace hackers. Across the board, we're seeing customers using vulnerability report data to inform their software development lifecycles. Organizations are catching issues earlier, and remediating them, at greatly reduced cost by focusing on improvements to developer education, source code integrations, and development frameworks."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	12/08 Tor's main site blocked in Russia
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/tor-s-main-site-blocked-in-russia-as-censorship-widens/
GIST	<p>The Tor Project's main website, torproject.org, is actively blocked by Russia's largest internet service providers, and sources from the country claim that the government is getting ready to conduct an extensive block of the project.</p> <p>Tor is a software project that allows users to automatically encrypt and reroute their web requests through a network of Tor nodes for anonymous browsing.</p> <p>It is commonly used to protect one's identity from the internet and service providers, helps users hide their online trace, access shared information without fearing exposure, and bypass censorship.</p> <p>Russia's censorship of Tor's site started on December 1, 2021, but many initially disregarded it by suggesting it was merely a side effect of experimentation with the Runet, Russia's sovereign internet project.</p> <p>However, as it now seems to be the case, Russia is undergoing a coordinated action against Tor, orchestrated by Roskomnadzor, the Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology and Mass Media.</p> <p>This blocking occurred simultaneously with the banning of six more VPN services in Russia, introducing multi-level anonymous Internet access hurdles to users in the country.</p>

According to [Roskomsvoboda](#), a Russian NGO focused on digital rights, the blocking was started by the telecommunications carrier Rostelecom on December 1, 2021, with MTS and Tele 2 following with similar action on December 3, 2021.

People attempting to access Tor could do so by using proxies or covert channels such as "bridges," but the blocking reportedly affects some of those alternative channels.

In response to the situation, the Tor Project has published a post urging volunteers to run Tor bridges to help keep Russians online.

"Russia is the country with the second-largest number of Tor users, with more than 300,000 daily users or 15% of all Tor users. As it seems this situation could quickly escalate to a country-wide Tor block, it's urgent that we respond to this censorship! We need your help NOW to keep Russians connected to Tor!" pleads [Tor's blog post](#).

Moreover, Russian-based users are asked to help Tor understand how the censoring unfolds from a technical perspective by using the [OONI probe app](#) and running circumvention tests.

The Tor Project [requested its community](#) to help run new Tor Bridges on November 17, 2021, which could be the reason behind the censorship escalation against it.

It is unfortunate that Russia has decided to move aggressively against the Tor Project and users of the Onion network, but it's not surprising at all.

The action is in perfect alignment with the overall strategy of the country's authorities to gain complete control over what online resources its people are allowed to access.

To those willing to try circumvention methods, it is suggested that you start by securing your anonymity in any technical means possible, as the state may soon escalate the enforcement of the censorship by detecting its violators.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	12/08 XE Group exposed: 8yrs of hacking, theft
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/xe-group-exposed-for-eight-years-of-hacking-credit-card-theft/
GIST	<p>A relatively unknown group of Vietnamese hackers calling themselves 'XE Group' has been linked to eight years of for-profit hacking and credit card skimming.</p> <p>The threat actors are thought to be responsible for the theft of thousands of credit cards per day, mainly from restaurants, non-profit, art, and travel platforms.</p> <p>The actors use publicly available exploits to compromise externally-facing services, prominently Telerik UI flaws, to install credential and payment info stealing malware.</p> <p>A 2020 Malwarebytes report first outlined the group's activities, but a more in-depth analysis of recent compromises attributed to it was published by Volexity yesterday.</p> <p>More details emerge</p> <p>Volexity was able to map the infrastructure used by the XE Group in the last three years and shared all the technical details and IOCs on GitHub.</p> <p>The researchers could find many infected sites carrying the same skimmer thanks to a common technique in loading malicious JavaScript snippets.</p>

"The code used to load the malicious JavaScript from this page reveals that the attacker uses an interesting technique: the JavaScript keyword "object" is used to populate the domain value," the researchers shared in the Volexity report.

These types of breaches are categorized as "Magecart" attacks, which is when a threat actor hacks an eCommerce site to add malicious JavaScript that collects customer and payment information as it is submitted. This stolen information is then uploaded to a remote server to be collected by the attackers.

The long-term success of these attacks depends on how well they can remain hidden on a website without being detected by security products.

Looking into the XE Group

Volexity attributes the XE Group's activity to Vietnamese threat actors as several of the domain names used for command and control servers are registered to a person in Vietnam.

While domain registration information can be faked, the researchers linked the registrant, Joe Nguyen, to a GitHub repository using the XE avatar created by someone of the same name.

Additionally, the nickname "xethanh" associated with the GitHub repository also had an account on the crdclub[.]su forum where they offered stolen credit card information.

The researchers found similar accounts on other carding forums such as cybercarders[.]su and cardingforum[.]co, so the actor prefers selling the card instead of using them.

"The persona used for the GitHub and carding account, and several of the domains, have a history going back to 2013, which suggests the attacker may have been attempting similar attacks for up to eight years, with only one significant public mention of their activity," explained [Volexity](#)

Finally, some of the malware files discovered in VirusTotal appear to have been uploaded by Vietnamese users. Threat actors commonly use VirusTotal before launching campaigns to test how well antivirus software can detect their malware.

Defenders can block XE Group attacks using the provided [network indicators](#) or detect the threat using [these signatures](#).

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	12/08 Credit card swipers infect WordPress sites
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/hackers-infect-random-wordpress-plugins-to-steal-credit-cards/
GIST	<p>Credit card swipers are being injected into random plugins of e-commerce WordPress sites, hiding from detection while stealing customer payment details.</p> <p>With the Christmas shopping season in full swing, card-stealing threat actors raise their efforts to infect online shops with stealthy skimmers, so administrators ought to remain vigilant.</p> <p>The latest trend is injecting card skimmers into WordPress plugin files, avoiding the closely-monitored 'wp-admin' and 'wp-includes' core directories where most injections are short-lived.</p> <p>Hiding in plain sight</p> <p>According to a new report by Sucuri, hackers performing credit card theft are first hacking into WordPress sites and injecting a backdoor into the website for persistence.</p> <p>These backdoors allow the hackers to retain access to the site, even if the administrator installs the latest security updates for WordPress and installed plugins.</p>

	<p>When the attackers use the backdoor in the future, it will scan for a list of administrator users and use their authorization cookie and current user login to access the site.</p> <p>The threat actors then add their malicious code to random plugins, and according to Sucuri, many of the scripts are not even obfuscated.</p> <p>However, when examining the code, the analysts noticed that an image optimization plugin contained references to WooCommerce and included undefined variables. This plugin has no vulnerabilities and is believed to have been selected by the threat actors at random.</p> <p>By using PHP 'get_defined_vars()', Sucuri was able to find out that one of these undefined variables references a domain hosted on an Alibaba server in Germany.</p> <p>This domain had no link to the compromised website they were looking into, which is conducting business in North America.</p> <p>The same site had a second injection on the 404-page plugin, which held the actual credit card skimmer using the same approach of hidden variables in unobfuscated code.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	12/08 Report: passports most attacked form of ID
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/passports-now-most-attacked-form-id/?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>A new report on identity fraud has found that passports are now the most frequently attacked form of identity document.</p> <p>Onfido's 2022 Identity Fraud Report revealed that over the past year, passports overtook national identity cards as fraudsters' favorite ID to forge.</p> <p>"This points to a shift in fraudsters' methods as they choose to target the one-sided passport page, rather than a two-sided ID card, and target the most high-assurance document in the hope that a passport's reputation will help the fake go undetected," said Onfido researchers.</p> <p>Document fraud specialists at Onfido process millions of identity documents every year, helping clients detect fraud across 2,500 document types issued by 195 countries. The company's report is based on analysis of data collected from October 1, 2020, to October 1, 2021.</p> <p>Other key findings shared in the report are that fraudsters typically prefer to create a fake document from scratch rather than doctor a genuine ID.</p> <p>"Over 90% of ID fraud in the past year involved counterfeit documents using a complete reproduction of an original document, instead of adapting an existing ID," said Onfido.</p> <p>Modern identity documents feature multiple security features that make modifications easily detectable, but fraudsters are raising their game and creating increasingly sophisticated forgeries.</p> <p>Over the past year, 47% of all identity document fraud was classed as "medium" sophisticated fraud, which is a 57% increase compared with the previous year.</p> <p>Losses from identity theft also grew significantly, ballooning by 42% to reach \$712bn in 2020.</p> <p>Identity fraud is yet to return to its pre-pandemic level. In 2020, there was a 41% increase in ID fraud, with the average ID fraud rate reaching 5.8%. Over the past year, the average fraud rate was recorded at 5.9%.</p>

	<p>“Fraudulent documents open up avenues for serious organized crime, including money laundering and terrorist financing. Consequently, failure to identify fraudulent documents in both real-world and online scenarios poses a threat to the global economy, countries, and their citizens,” commented INTERPOL.</p> <p>“Increasingly, we have to adapt to the digital use of identity documents, as well as physical. Businesses and governments alike are facing challenges when identifying fraud in this environment.”</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	12/08 Australia CS Energy foils cyberattack
SOURCE	https://securityaffairs.co/wordpress/125393/cyber-crime/cs-energy-ransomware-attack.html?web_view=true
GIST	<p>A ransomware cyberattack hit a major energy network operated by CS Energy, that attack could have had dramatic consequences leaving millions of homes without energy.</p> <p>The attack took place on Saturday, November 27, experts believe it was launched by Chinese hackers.</p> <p>The attack was detected and neutralized just in time, before it had the potential to shut down two major thermal coal plants.</p> <p><i>“If the attack had been successful, 3500 megawatts of power would have been taken out of the grid, enough for between 1.4 and three million homes.” reported the website News.com.au.</i></p> <p>The quick response of CS Energy avoided the catastrophe, the CEO Andrew Bills explained that the company isolate the corporate network from the Callide and Kogan Creek power stations to prevent impacting their generators.</p> <p>The company notified Federal and state agencies and retained cyber security experts to investigate the incident.</p> <p><i>“CS Energy moved quickly to contain this incident by segregating the corporate network from other internal networks and enacting business continuity processes,” Mr Bills said. “Unfortunately, cyber events are a growing trend in Australia and overseas. This incident may have affected our corporate network, but we are fortunate to have a resilient and highly skilled workforce who remain focused on ensuring CS Energy continues to deliver electricity to Queenslanders.”</i></p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	12/08 Supply chain threats still loom
SOURCE	https://www.wired.com/story/solarwinds-hack-supply-chain-threats-improvements/
GIST	<p>A YEAR AGO today, the security firm FireEye made an announcement that was as surprising as it was alarming. Sophisticated hackers had silently slipped into the company's network, carefully tailoring their attack to evade the company's defenses. It was a thread that would unspool into what is now known as the SolarWinds hack, a Russian espionage campaign that resulted in the compromise of countless victims.</p> <p>To say the SolarWinds attack was a wake-up call would be an understatement. It laid bare how extensive the fallout can be from so-called supply chain attacks, when attackers compromise widely used software at the source, in turn giving them the ability to infect anyone who uses it. In this case, it meant that Russian intelligence had potential access to as many as 18,000 SolarWinds customers. They ultimately broke into fewer than 100 choice networks—including those of Fortune 500 companies like Microsoft and the US Justice Department, State Department, and NASA.</p> <p>Supply chain attacks aren't new. But the magnitude of the SolarWinds crisis significantly raised awareness, sparking a year of frantic investment in security improvements across the tech industry and US government.</p> <p>“If I don’t get a call on December 12, I’ll consider that a success,” says SolarWinds president and CEO Sudhakar Ramakrishna. On that date a year ago, SolarWinds itself learned that Orion, its IT management</p>

tool, was the source of the FireEye intrusion—and what would ultimately become dozens more. Ramakrishna did not yet work at SolarWinds, but he was slated to join on January 4, 2021.

While this week marks the one-year anniversary of cascading discoveries around the SolarWinds hack, the incident actually dates back as early as March 2020. Russia's APT 29 hackers—also known as Cozy Bear, UNC2452, and Nobelium—spent months laying the groundwork. But that very dissonance illustrates the nature of software supply chain threats. The hardest part of the job is upfront. If the staging phase is successful, they can flip a switch and simultaneously gain access to many victim networks at once, all with trusted software that seems legitimate.

Across the security industry, practitioners universally told WIRED that the SolarWinds hack—also called the Sunburst hack, after the backdoor malware distributed through Orion—has meaningfully expanded understanding about the need for transparency and insight into the provenance and integrity of software. There had certainly been other impactful software supply chain attacks before December 2020, like the [compromise of computer cleanup tool CCleaner](#) and Russia's [infamous distribution of the destructive NotPetya malware](#) through the Ukrainian accounting software MEDoc. But for the US government and tech industry, the new campaign hit especially close to home.

“It definitely was a turning point,” says Eric Brewer, Google's vice president of Cloud Infrastructure. “Before I would explain to people that the industry has a challenge here, we need to deal with it. And I think there was some understanding, but it wasn't very highly prioritized. Attacks people haven't seen directly are just abstract. But post-SolarWinds that message resonated in a different way.”

That awareness has also begun to translate into action, including building out the software equivalent of ingredient lists and ways to better monitor code. But it's slow work; the supply chain problem requires as many solutions as there are types of software development.

Keeping tabs on proprietary systems like MEDoc and Orion is challenging because security tools need to foster transparency and validation without exposing competitive secrets or intellectual property. The problem becomes especially complicated for open source software, where developers are often volunteers and projects may not have stable funding—if they're even maintained at all anymore. On top of that, developers often repurpose useful chunks of open source code, which in turn means that a supply chain attack that compromises an open source tool could push malicious updates to far-flung systems. Or tainted code could circulate freely online and get pulled into other software without a second thought.

An [executive order](#) in mid-May was one tangible sign of progress. The Biden White House addressed numerous aspects of government cybersecurity, with a specific section dedicated to the supply chain. It outlined requirements for federal agencies to generate guidelines, conduct evaluations, and implement improvements.

“The development of commercial software often lacks transparency, sufficient focus on the ability of the software to resist attack, and adequate controls to prevent tampering by malicious actors,” the order states. “There is a pressing need to implement more rigorous and predictable mechanisms for ensuring that products function securely, and as intended.”

The US government has a [poor track record](#) when it comes to actually following through on fixing its cybersecurity weak spots. But Dan Lorenc, a longtime software supply chain security researcher and CEO of the startup Chainguard, says he's been pleasantly surprised to see federal agencies actually adhering to the timelines set by the White House, perhaps an early indicator that the software supply chain security epiphany will have some staying power.

“I think the White House set some very aggressive time frames, which raised eyebrows both in the private sector and among government agencies,” says Allan Friedman, a senior advisor and strategist at the Department of Homeland Security's Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security. “But I think because it has been such a clear priority, agencies have been able to meet the deadlines thus far, and I think it's also helped the broader software community understand that the whole administration is serious about this.”

The federal software supply chain security initiative also has a major focus on public-private cooperation. At a White House cybersecurity meeting with major tech companies at the end of August, Google announced \$10 billion in security investment over five years, listing software supply chain as a high priority focus. Brewer and his colleagues, for example, have spent several years working on a project called OpenSSF, a scorecard framework that allows developers to assess the potential risks of open source software. Other initiatives from companies like GitHub, which is owned by Microsoft, aim to automatically [spot security vulnerabilities](#) and other weaknesses in open source projects. A decentralized project known as Sigstore, launched in June, is working to make it simple for open source projects to [implement “code signing,”](#) an important integrity check used in proprietary software that open source projects often omit. And researchers at Google also created a software supply chain integrity framework for developers known as [SLSA](#) (pronounced “salsa”).

“It’s been a crazy year,” says Chainguard's Lorenc, who previously worked at Google and worked on Sigstore and SLSA. “After the SolarWinds incident it almost was a night and day shift in awareness and momentum. Last December and January were a huge wake-up moment, and there was a lot of panic with everyone trying to figure out what to do. But ultimately that’s better than nobody paying attention at all.”

CISA has been working to expand a 2018 project to develop and popularize “SBOMs,” or software bills of materials. The idea is to create a sort of “nutrition facts” reference for software that provides insight and inventory about what’s in a finished product and what potential exposures it may have as a result. And the May executive order specifically mandates that the National Institute of Standards and Technology develop guidelines for SBOMs.

Next week, CISA will [host](#) a virtual “SBOM-a-rama” event as part of its efforts to facilitate public-private collaboration on software bills of materials.

“This is Cybersecurity 101; the most basic thing you can do is say, ‘what do you have?’” says CISA's Friedman. “If you’re thinking about software, there’s typically not enough information to know what’s under the hood. We don’t have the data. No one can instinctively look for the allergens on the ingredient list. But we’re already seeing organizations and startups building out the tools.”

SolarWinds CEO Ramakrishna says the company itself has undergone a massive security overhaul this year, changing the way it approaches its own internal security, reexamining how it interconnects with partners and customers, and taking steps to promote software supply chain security best practices. The company has particularly [embraced open source](#) as a way to bring added transparency and flexibility in its own supply chain.

Even with all of these initiatives and improvements across the industry, software supply chain insecurity is still a very real and current problem. For example, a breach this spring that compromised a software development tool from the company Codecov [impacted hundreds](#) of the firm’s customers, and a hack of the IT managed services provider [Kaseya spawned a number](#) of damaging ransomware attacks in July. In recent years, [numerous open source projects](#) have been [compromised](#).

Meanwhile, the attackers behind the SolarWinds intrusion haven’t been resting on their laurels. Nobelium has continued to target prominent companies, government entities, and nonprofits in the US and around the world for espionage. Throughout 2021, the group has mounted [aggressive phishing attacks](#) and other campaigns to steal credentials, [infiltrated](#) email accounts and other systems, and even [attacked resellers and cloud customization](#) service providers in attempts to compromise other parts of the tech supply chain.

“Looking back over the past year, Nobelium’s wide-scale attacks are difficult to overstate,” Vasu Jakkal, corporate vice president of security, compliance, and identity at Microsoft, told WIRED in a statement. “It has been a moment of reckoning illustrating how technology has become both a defensive tool and an offensive weapon.”

	<p>So for all the progress over the last year, software supply chain security experts emphasize that the risks and exposures are still very real and can't be solved with any one solution.</p> <p>“A SolarWinds-type attack could happen at any point and may actually be in the process of happening right now,” says Charles Carmakal, senior vice president and chief technical officer of the cybersecurity firm Mandiant, which was a division of FireEye during the company’s breach last year. “I don’t want to be the guy who’s negative, I also want to celebrate the wins this year, but it’s still an effective way to break into a target.”</p> <p>After decades of the issue being overlooked, though, at least the right people are finally paying attention to the supply chain threat.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	12/08 AWS outage disrupted businesses, homes
SOURCE	https://www.msn.com/en-us/money/other/how-amazon-outage-left-smart-homes-not-so-smart-after-all/ar-AAARAEZv
GIST	<p>(Bloomberg) -- The outage at Amazon.com Inc.’s cloud-computing arm left thousands of people in the U.S. without working fridges, roombas and doorbells, highlighting just how reliant people have become on the company as the Internet of Things proliferates across homes.</p> <p>The disruption, which began at about 10 a.m. Eastern time Tuesday, upended package deliveries, took down major streaming services, and prevented people from getting into Walt Disney Co.’s parks.</p> <p>Affected Amazon services included the voice assistant Alexa and Ring smart-doorbell unit.irate device users tweeted their frustrations to Ring’s official account, with many complaining that they spent time rebooting or reinstalling their apps and devices before finding out on Twitter that there was a general Amazon Web Services outage. Multiple Ring users even said they weren’t able to get into their homes without access to the phone app, which was down.</p> <p>Others said they weren’t able to turn on their Christmas lights.</p> <p>Smart lightbulbs stopped responding to voice commands, many people reported.</p> <p>Basic household chores also become impossible for some.</p> <p>The outage prompted people to reflect on the pitfalls of having a “smart” home that’s overly dependent on not only the internet, but one company in particular -- while those with “dumb” homes gloated that their fridges and light switches were working just fine.</p> <p>Several of the affected AWS operations were on the East Coast. AWS said about nine hours later that it had resolved the network device issues that led to the outage.</p>
	Return to Top

Terror Conditions

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	12/09 Iraq, US-led coalition conclude talks
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/middle-east-iraq-national-security-islamic-state-group-f2dd669cc9b587ea166d942a39796758
GIST	<p>IRBIL, Iraq (AP) — Iraq and the U.S.-led coalition concluded a final round of technical talks to formally transition from a combat mission tasked to root out the Islamic State to an advisory mission to assist Iraqi forces, Iraqi security officials announced on Thursday.</p>

Iraq's National Security Advisor Qassim al-Araji tweeted that the talks — which centered on the transition — had concluded, formally ending the coalition's combat mission. He said the coalition would continue providing assistance, advice and training for Iraqi forces.

The announcement reaffirms a July decision by the Biden administration to end the U.S. combat mission in Iraq by Dec. 31. There are roughly 2,500 U.S. troops remaining in Iraq. It is unclear how many will remain in the next phase of coalition assistance.

At Thursday's talks the coalition said it was prepared to end the combat mission before the set deadline, said Kurdish Peshmurga Brig. Gen. Hazhar Ismail, who attended the meeting in Baghdad.

"They said we are ready starting from today," he said.

But the formal end of the combat mission is unlikely to change the facts on the ground; the coalition stopped engaging in combat missions early in 2020. Since then, the main U.S. focus has been assisting Iraqi forces, not fighting on their behalf.

Iraqi security forces still require coalition air support to conduct strikes on IS targets and for intelligence gathering, both Iraqi and Kurdish security officials have said. They also need assistance maintaining US provided weaponry and equipment.

Iraq has witnessed an uptick in IS attacks lately across a stretch of disputed northern territory that has long served as a hotbed for terrorist activity.

The intention to shift from a U.S. combat role to one focused on training and advising the Iraqi security forces was announced earlier, in April, when a joint U.S.-Iraqi statement said this transition allowed for the removal from Iraq of any remaining U.S. combat forces on a timetable to be determined later.

For years, U.S. troops have played support roles in Iraq and in neighboring Syria, which was the origin of the Islamic State group that swept across the border in 2014 and captured large swaths of Iraqi territory, prompting the U.S. to send troops back to Iraq that year.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	12/08 Conviction mass surveillance case upheld
SOURCE	https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2021/12/08/federal-court-upholds-terrorism-conviction-mass-surveillance-case/6440325001/
GIST	<p>A federal appeals court on Wednesday upheld the terrorism conviction of a refugee from Uzbekistan in a controversial case that has shed light on the widespread, ongoing efforts of the U.S. government to spy on international phone, email and chat communications.</p> <p>Jamshid Muhtorov — a legal permanent resident of the U.S. whose email communications were searched by the U.S. government under Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) — has spent almost all of the past nine years in federal custody.</p> <p>On Wednesday, the American Civil Liberties Union decried the ruling by the U.S. 10th Circuit Court of Appeals. The ACLU described Muhtorov, 45, as a prominent human rights defender who committed no terrorist acts, but still became a target of overzealous U.S. authorities with broad search powers. He was living in Aurora, Colorado and was employed as a truck driver at the time of his arrest in 2012.</p> <p>The ACLU said Wednesday that the case continues to present troubling questions for the American public.</p> <p>"We don't give up bedrock Fourth Amendment protections when we communicate with family, friends, and colleagues abroad, contrary to the court's ruling today. Under Section 702, the government for years has amassed our online messages, chats, and emails without a warrant, violating the constitutional rights of</p>

countless Americans, including Mr. Muhtorov,” said Patrick Toomey, senior staff attorney with the ACLU’s National Security Project.

“Mass surveillance threatens all of us. The FBI and NSA don’t have a free pass to seize and sift through our most sensitive communications, and we will keep fighting to ensure they can’t violate the Constitution.”

Federal attorneys in [the appeals case continue to maintain](#) that Muhtorov fully intended to provide material support to a designated foreign terrorist organization. The FBI alleged that he planned to travel overseas and fight on behalf of the Pakistan-based Islamic Jihad Union, which has conducted suicide attacks in Uzbekistan and claims responsibility for attacks against coalition forces in Afghanistan.

He was convicted of conspiring to support a terrorist group and making plans to join the organization himself. He received an 11 year sentence, less than what prosecutors requested.

In 2013, after [Edward Snowden’s revelations about the scope of the National Security Agency’s mass surveillance](#), Mr. Muhtorov became the first person to receive notice from the government about the monitoring of his communications under Section 702 of FISA. The highly controversial statute allows the NSA to engage in dragnet, warrantless surveillance of Americans’ international phone calls, emails, chats, and web-browsing.

Shortly after Mr. Muhtorov arrived in the United States in 2007, [the U.S. government began surveilling him](#), and in 2012, it charged him with attempting to provide material support to the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) in Uzbekistan.

For years, federal agents tracked Mr. Muhtorov’s movements, installed bugs in his home, and listened to the intimate details of his family life. They recorded his phone calls and intercepted untold amounts of his electronic communications.

Under Section 702, the government intercepts the international communications of hundreds of thousands of people, including people living in the United States. The government stores these communications in massive databases, retains them for years, and searches them repeatedly for information about people in the United States — including in domestic criminal investigations.

The Justice Department maintains the FISA program does not violate Fourth Amendment protection against illegal searches because it picks up U.S.-based individuals only while targeting those overseas.

Muhtorov [was arrested by FBI agents on Jan. 21, 2012](#), in Chicago as he was trying to board a plane to Turkey. [Court documents say](#) he was carrying \$2,865 and recently purchased electronic equipment — including two iPhones and an iPad tablet — for the IJU. He intended to become a propaganda expert.

“‘Yeah, but what I really want to do is go fight and lose my life in the jihad,’” a federal prosecutor quoted Muhtorov as telling co-defendant and fellow Uzbekistan refugee Bakhityor Jumaev in a phone conversation recorded by the FBI.

"He wanted to fight with a 'weapon in one hand and with the Quran in the other,'" the court document says.

Muhtorov’s attorneys said at his trial that his talk about joining a jihad was a fantasy similar to dreaming of being in a cavalry charge with swords flashing while riding alongside Lawrence of Arabia, and that his claim of joining the IJU was a tale he concocted while driving as a commercial truck driver 18 hours a day.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	12/08 Kenya man sets off explosives, kills 2
SOURCE	https://allafrica.com/stories/202112090163.html

GIST	<p>Nairobi — Kenyan authorities say a suspected suicide bomber killed himself and two others Tuesday in Kisumu County, on the border with Uganda. Police say the suspect was a member of the Somalia-based al-Shabab terrorist group.</p> <p>The suspect detonated explosives Tuesday night, killing two people and injuring one in Kamloma village in western Kenya.</p> <p>"While he was talking to the neighbor, the IED went off killing him instantly and the wife of the neighbor and also injured the neighbor and the daughter. The neighbor died on his way to the hospital. The daughter is admitted to hospital but in stable condition," Kisumu County Police Commander Richard Ngeno said.</p> <p>So far, police have not established a motive for the attack.</p> <p>The area assistant police chief, James Okoth, told VOA that suspect John Ondiek was spotted in the area Tuesday after being away for several months.</p> <p>He said Ondiek came home around August last year, built a home, and moved to the Katito area.</p> <p>The suspect had previously lived in the coastal city of Mombasa.</p> <p>Kenyan media report the attacker was radicalized there and later joined Somali militant group al-Shabab.</p> <p>Late last year, the suspect allegedly tried to kill his girlfriend in the Katito area. Police say a bomb he assembled inside the house injured the woman.</p> <p>Until now, western Kenya has seen no terrorist incidents, unlike Nairobi, the coast and northeastern regions.</p> <p>Nairobi-based security expert Richard Tuta said a terrorist could operate anywhere.</p> <p>"We cannot confine terrorism to a particular jurisdiction and if you want to confine it to a particular jurisdiction, then you will be wrong because that's the point of departure between terrorist and insurgency because the insurgency has a physical location you can locate them to but terrorism defies country, county and regional boundary," he said.</p> <p>For more than a decade, al-Shabab has recruited Kenyan youths to bolster its ranks and carry out attacks against targets in Kenya, which stations troops in Somalia to support the Mogadishu government.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	12/09 Displaced Nigerians fear return home
SOURCE	https://news.trust.org/item/20211209085725-a8rfr/
GIST	<p>MAIDUGURI, Nigeria, Dec 9 (Reuters) - Hauwa Ahmadu Kukuda rakes straw from the top of the two-room shack she shares with eight children. Goats jostle for it as the children crouch next to tarp-covered walls.</p> <p>Outside, row after dusty row stretches for miles in the Bakassi camp in Maiduguri, the capital of Nigeria's northeastern Borno state, which houses some 30,000 people displaced by 12 years of Islamist insurgency.</p> <p>For Kukuda, 42, Bakassi has been home for the seven years since Boko Haram militants killed her husband in rural Gwoza. Life is tough, but she is terrified to leave.</p> <p>"There no peace in my hometown," Kukuda said.</p> <p>Kukuda, like the nearly 300,000 others in Maiduguri's camps, might not have a choice.</p>

Borno state plans to close all Maiduguri camps by the end of the year, citing improved security and the surrender of thousands of Boko Haram fighters in recent months.

Residents rely on the government for food, so it can easily force them out. But militant attacks across Borno continue, stoking their fears about returning home.

Data from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), showed 2,532 people had died in attacks in Borno by the end of November, compared with 3,184 in 2020. In recent months, Islamist militants killed a general, a commanding officer and a lieutenant. Borno Governor Babagana Zulum's own convoy came under fire in the town of Malam Fatori in October. [nL8N2RQ0UM]

"They can say it's not as bad, but at no point in time has it been that there is a cessation of hostility," said Idayat Hassan, director of the Abuja-based research organization the Centre for Democracy and Development. "There are hardly any weeks where there is actually no attack."

A Zulum spokesman said the governor "only approves and encourages safe, voluntary and dignified resettlement." He said they would support anyone who wished to live elsewhere in Maiduguri instead of returning home.

"The most important thing is to ensure safe and dignified living for (internally displaced people) through productive means of livelihoods. Relying on donor support is not sustainable," spokesman Isa Gusau said.

Bakassi camp residents said Zulum offered them cash to leave – 100,000 naira (\$244) for men, 50,000 naira for women.

Abba Rawa, 50, said he returned home to Marte last year at Zulum's urging. Security is so bad that residents cannot go more than a kilometre outside town – a problem for residents who farm or fish for a living. He said they are totally reliant on government.

"We live in hunger," he said, surrounded by Bakassi residents discussing their plans.

Privately, aid workers doubt the camps will quickly shut. But some have already left, and the workers worry that they cannot help those in insecure rural areas.

Hassan said that while the camps are imperfect, forcing them to return home is risky, particularly if they cannot farm or fish.

"There should be no compulsion," Hassan said. "Everything that should be done should actually be based on the protection of civilians."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	12/08 UN peacekeepers killed in central Mali
SOURCE	https://www.wral.com/7-un-peacekeepers-killed-3-critically-hurt-in-central-mali/20024155/
GIST	<p>UNITED NATIONS — Seven U.N. peacekeepers were killed and three critically injured when their vehicle was blasted by an improvised explosive device in central Mali on Wednesday, bringing the death toll of U.N. soldiers in the troubled west African nation to 19 so far this year.</p> <p>U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said all the peacekeepers killed and injured were from Togo, and the U.N. peacekeeping department said the seven deaths were the highest number from a malicious act against peacekeepers in Mali this year.</p> <p>Mali has struggled to contain an Islamic extremist insurgency since 2012. Extremist rebels were forced from power in Mali's northern cities with the help of a French-led military operation, but they regrouped in the desert and began launching attacks on the Malian army and its allies. Insecurity has worsened with attacks on civilians and U.N. peacekeepers.</p>

	<p>In June, Col. Assimi Goita was sworn in as president of a transitional government after carrying out his second coup in nine months. Mali faces increasing isolation from the international community over the junta's power grab. Elections are due to be held in February, though there are fears they could be delayed.</p> <p>Dujarric said the IED detonated in the Bandiagara region, hitting the vehicle carrying peacekeepers from Togo who were part of a U.N. logistics convoy traveling from Douentza to Sevare. The U.N. peacekeeping department said the soldiers were traveling in an armored personnel carrier.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	12/08 Covid change violent extremist landscape?
SOURCE	https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20211208-how-has-covid19-changed-the-violent-extremist-landscape
GIST	<p>The COVID-19 pandemic has upended the normative social order of democratic societies in profound ways: lockdowns, public health mandates, a range of restrictions on movement and behavior, and the rapid development of new-generation vaccines. This disruption has occurred amid an environment of risk and uncertainty that threatens peoples' sense of security, stability, and resilience. The rise of pandemic-led conspiracy thinking has therefore been predictable.</p> <p>There is a well-established relationship between conspiracy narratives and the sense of threat, particularly concerning system identity threat, or the view that society is fundamentally changing. QAnon influencers, for example, quickly harnessed their conspiracy movement's anti-government, "Deep State" narrative of corrupt, shadowy elites to fit with how states around the world were responding to the pandemic's public health threats.</p> <p>However, QAnon's dark prophesies of a New World Order that would upend civilization is not new, drawing together a pastiche of familiar, pre-existing militant narratives based on anti-Semitism, white nationalism, anti-vaccination, and anti-technology discourse.</p> <p>Some of these older militant narratives have long been associated with violent action against minorities and violent resistance to the state. It is, therefore, unsurprising that the rise of pandemic-inspired conspiracist movements has been escalated and capitalized on by violent extremist movements across the board.</p> <p>EUROPOL has warned that COVID-19 will continue to escalate violent extremist threats in various countries, increasing tolerance for violence in response to pandemic-induced stressors. This runs alongside evidence that ideologically diverse violent extremist networks are exploiting pandemic-related vulnerabilities through online propaganda and recruitment efforts.</p> <p>As our AVERT Research Network submission to Australia's parliamentary inquiry on extremist movements and radicalism argues, the extension of government authority and curtailing of individual liberties during a public health emergency have been consistently reframed by extremists as instruments of social control, government corruption, and state illegitimacy, accelerating what Ehud Sprinzak (1991) terms the "transformational delegitimation" of democratic societies and institutions.</p> <p>New Gateways to Violent Extremism</p> <p>While QAnon influencers were predictably nimble in exploiting gateway online anti-child abuse and exploitation networks to grow their impact, pandemic-inspired intersection of lifestyle and wellness, violent extremism, and conspiracy networks has been more novel.</p> <p>In Australia, the former chef and dietary wellness influencer Pete Evans posted the neo-Nazi "sonnenrad" or "black sun" swastika for his many online followers, a symbol appropriated by the Nazis to signal the rebirth of Aryanism. Other wellness influencers have also energetically sought to monetize the surge of interest in anti-authority conspiracies by promoting product-based resistance to public health measures.</p>

The Weaponization of COVID-19

[The promotion of conspiracies and disinformation can be understood as a form of attack.](#) For those who seek to escalate violent conflict, accelerate civil unrest, and enhance social and political polarization, COVID-19 has been a swiftly weaponized gift, for example, by encouraging followers to deliberately spread COVID-19 as a means of hastening the collapse of civilization or the elimination of hated others. These efforts have been significantly aided by the shift to extensive online social interaction as well as information-gathering to make sense of the upheaval.

This is particularly the case for young people who are arguably bearing a disproportionate pandemic-related burden in terms of disrupted schooling, dwindling or precarious employment, isolation from face-to-face culturally diversified social settings, and mental health and housing challenges (Lowe, 2021). Under these circumstances, the vulnerability of young people – already a generation of digital natives – to the online social harms of violent extremist conspiratorial ideologies can intensify.

Addressing the Intersection of COVID-19 and Extremist Ideologies

A key question raised by the impact of the pandemic on drivers toward violent extremism is whether these impacts are likely to be acute or chronic.

Will the cessation or moderation of the pandemic, driven by increased global vaccination rates and the restoring of individual liberties and movement, see extremist conspiracy uptake subside? Or will the longer-term social, economic, and political impacts of the pandemic, which may well outlast the immediate public health crisis, provide fertile ground for continuing political and social polarization that extremists can channel toward violent action?

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	12/08 'Alt-jihad' rising on social media
SOURCE	https://www.wired.com/story/alt-jihad-rising-social-media/#intcid=wired-verso-hp-trending_0bd5bd00-72d7-4631-97ad-c5ff98ee3783_popular4-1
GIST	<p>AS KABUL FELL to the Taliban in mid-August, a rallying cry inundated social media platforms globally: <i>one struggle</i>. The digital drumbeat could be heard across Facebook posts, Instagram comment threads, and Telegram channels. It was aided by digital characters now so ubiquitous on the internet that they go by singular names: Pepe, Wojak, and GigaChad. Those posting the memes were not just members of the so-called alt-right, though they too united around the call, but also young jihadists, who are piecing together a new online aesthetic inspired by the world's most notorious trolls.</p> <p>Unlike their predecessors, the post-September 11 generation of young internet jihadists is no longer simply defined by their ideological affinities. This is a generation that was born into a global war on terror, came of age during the rise of the Islamic State, and witnessed the Taliban taking back control of Afghanistan. A generation that no longer trusts its self-appointed leaders, others within its communities, or mainstream religious mores. A generation that seems outwardly conflicted, borrowing from those that hate what it represents but seemingly compelled by that very same hate. A generation as fluent in Hadith to support wanton violence as in the hatred of minorities and the latest DaBaby track.</p> <p>They are Generation Z jihadists—part TikTok dance, part Taliban victory lap, and part Islamic State punishments and pronouncements—and the parallels with the alt-right movement in the US, which similarly rejects modernity in favor of tradition, run much deeper than the mere appropriation of language and imagery. Indeed the very same dynamics that led to the founding of the alt-right are now fueling a growing movement of polyglot “alt-jihadists” of all stripes. And just as there was an initial deriding of the alt-right as a fringe movement with no significance, a similar disregard is meeting the culture of alt-jihadists forming across popular social media platforms. But that is a mistake.</p> <p>THE “ALTERNATIVE RIGHT” began taking shape in the US in 2008 under the leadership of the white supremacist Richard Spencer and others. The movement was based on stolid, horribly noxious white nationalist ideas that had been around for decades—only this time there was no specific leadership, organizational structure, or goals. Instead, it was fueled by the decentralized internet. It grew into its own</p>

during the run-up to the 2016 presidential election, cementing itself on forums such as Reddit, 4Chan, and 8Chan. It birthed splinter groups, struggled to control territory after shutdowns of its spider holes of support online, and eventually found itself mainstreamed into the political discourse of conservatism. The presidency of Donald Trump catapulted the alt-right into prominence, offering lessons for other fringe movements and a clear playbook for taking an everyday trolling campaign mainstream. Sure enough, this very same roadmap is guiding a new generation of fringe jihadists.

Over the course of the past year, I worked with researchers at the [Institute for Strategic Dialogue \(ISD\)](#) to monitor and track the movement of this group across a diverse array of platforms, including Discord, Twitter, Facebook, and, most notably Instagram, where young jihad supporters are comingling with authoritarians, fascists, white nationalists, and other jihadists in what can only be described as “alternative Jihad.”

Alt-jihadists draw on the narratives of the alt-right and far right in Western culture wars while staying on brand with support for staple extremist groups such as Hezbollah, the Houthis, Hamas, the Taliban, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, al-Qaeda, and the Islamic State. And while the September 11 attacks serve as a historical reminder to this generation of the power to strike at the West, this demographic simultaneously views the events with skepticism as a result of “truther” movements positing conspiracies that it was an “inside job” and a secret plan by a cabal of Jews. These alt-jihadists span an incredibly diverse ideological spectrum, straddling and supporting the notions of ethno-states while seemingly deriding white supremacists who do the same. This circle of toxicity completes what has essentially been brewing since the alt-right’s ascendancy—an infectious set of abhorrent mores devoted to the hatred of liberalism, multiculturalism, sexuality, and democratic principles, with a dedication to going viral.

Across platforms, my team collected more than 5,000 memes and meme videos created and shared by alt-jihadists and the digital communities around them. Roughly 20 percent of these pieces of content were supportive of militant groups, including Hamas, the Taliban, and jihadist organizations such as Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham. We found similar dynamics with supporters of Iran-backed militias like Hezbollah and the Houthis. All of them used some form of alt-right trope or imagery—such as Pepe the Frog, GigaChads, Wojaks, and YesChads!—and all exhibited some affinity for a range of jihadist groups. Not only did young jihadists appropriate alt-right aesthetics, they similarly adopted the language of the other adjacent “chan” cultures, using words like “king,” “chad,” “based,” and “wifu,” transliterated into Arabic.

This group has also adopted the alt-right’s organizational tactics. Buried deep across six Facebook pages and groups, representing some 20,000 followers, are accounts engaged in explicitly jihadist meme discussions and production, most of which is in Arabic and supportive of the Islamic State and Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham. These users rely on the imagery of the alt-right to fuel their discussions, using videos of Pepe the Frog as a “Jihadi John” character preparing to behead an “LBGTQ+ Wojak” with an Islamic State *nasheed* playing in the background, or GigaChads to “own” liberal Muslims with support of the Taliban takeover. These smaller networks of alt-jihadists also linked to Telegram channels connected to a younger generation of alt-jihadist graphic designers, remixing and creating 8-bit graphic videos in support of the Islamic State, as well as Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham.

In what appears to be a natural evolution of trolling communities going global, alt-jihadists from the Middle East and North Africa are now also developing memes alongside groups in the West. For instance, as white nationalists began creating and sharing hyper-stylized cyberpunk music videos known as “fashwave,” alt-jihadists simultaneously created a parallel subculture known as “mujahidwave.” This version runs the gamut of support from resurrecting the Rashidun Caliphate to overt Islamic State messaging, blending the same aesthetics and synth styling.

The fusion of alt-right and jihadist aesthetics was perhaps clearest on the 20th anniversary of the September 11 attacks, when a coalition of alt-jihadist meme producers ran a competition to see who could create the best meme of the attacks. The challenge was shared through a central page on Facebook, coordinated on Telegram, and A/B tested on Discord. Soon, key accounts across all of the platforms began toiling away on GigaChad attack footage; Angry Birds, Salt Bae, and Doge spin-offs, and of course Pepe the Frog piloting one of the planes as it slammed into a tower. It was a celebration of America’s defeat—a

defining notion of alt-jihadist subcultures online. Not to be mistaken for simple shitposting, the mash-ups and overall movement of alt-jihadists represent a turning point in both extremist support and our modern era. It is a harbinger of the future of extremism, in which the cultures of seemingly oppositional groups meld and represent a much more noxious and undefinable challenge for technology companies, civil society, and governments.

THIS MERGING OF the malign online is altering the shape and form of digital extremism with an intent to cause real-world harm. Alt-jihadist communities are simultaneously splintering, uniting, and adapting to current events in a much more fluid manner than research into them and any responses, making these groups even more noxious than their predecessors. Undoubtedly, there will be commentators and analysts who disregard or downplay this burgeoning online community, but the damage is already done. We are well past the precipice when it comes to rethinking governmental and civil approaches to extremism two decades after 9/11. The rise of subcultures converging, borrowing, and ultimately partnering in broader culture wars is only indicative of one part of this challenge—the other more confounding element is why we haven’t adapted just as they have.

After all, our systems have gone through many of the same shocks that these communities have witnessed or taken part in, and yet we have remained relatively stolid. The use of counter or alternative narratives, for instance, to combat the noxious effects of these communities relies on talking points that champion multiculturalism, gender equality, and democratic principles. However, these are often designed separately for specific ideologies. So what does a counternarrative that can degrade the appeal of both the Islamic State and the philosophy of Christchurch mosque attacker Brenton Tarrant look like? Extremist subculture convergence—specifically those of chan culture, the alt-right, and jihadists—pose this challenge, and blanket responses that tackle one or the other without recognizing the interplay will by all accounts fall flat.

Some may imagine that extremist groups are relegated to “the dark corners of the internet,” but these communities are experiencing polyglot success on popular social media platforms. Alt-jihadists are currently in the community-building and recruitment phase, networking across platforms, borders, and languages and using memes as clickbait. They’re employing the “sticky media” by which they intend to form real-world fighting forces. For now, however, they are focused on dividing these digital spaces so they splinter further, ultimately giving the groups a larger pool of support to draw on. Social media companies will need to take on this challenge in a manner much different from anything we’ve seen to date. Striking users off social platforms will prove temporarily therapeutic, but it will not solve the issue. These communities breed rabid users who will continue to reappear and reconfigure their tactics to overcome any tech company measures. Again, one-off responses to a multi-platform challenge such as this will never be sufficient.

Using law enforcement to curb these communities will also prove unwieldy, as such a multipronged and multi-platformed challenge would simply exhaust resources. Law enforcement-led efforts would most notably violate First Amendment rights, as well as perpetuating a cycle of state surveillance of Muslim communities. Chasing down account holders could prove fruitful or futile but could also push supporters to become even more extreme, as if their initial stance didn’t go far enough.

The aesthetic and narrative convergence of extremist groups around the world makes it clear that the future of online extremism will be even more ideologically murky. It will only become more difficult to identify an immediate call to arms versus a troll powerplay—and our systems are not prepared for the next wave of extremism, simply because we haven’t adapted, or haven’t yet learned our lessons.

What is clear, however, is that alt-jihadists have learned theirs.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	12/09 Would-be terrorist trained for jihad in Texas?
SOURCE	https://www.thedailybeast.com/would-be-terrorist-trained-for-jihad-at-texas-gun-range-feds-allege?ref=home

When Navy sailors shot and killed a terrorist in the middle of an attack on a military base in Texas last year, the investigation seemed like it would be short-lived. The shooter, Adam Alsaqli, was dead and there were no apparent accomplices in the attack.

But text messages sent by Alsaqli on the morning of the attack have led the FBI to another Texas student whom law enforcement accuses of harboring extremist views. Over the past few months, prosecutors in Texas have sketched out Alsaqli's links to a criminal case involving an FBI informant, firearms training, and an alleged plan to travel to Gaza to wage "jihad."

In July, federal prosecutors charged Muctar Gouroudja Ahmadou, a Nigerian immigrant who came to the U.S. on a student visa in 2016, with illegal possession of a firearm after an FBI surveillance team followed him to a Houston-area gun range and allegedly observed him firing handguns and an AR-15 assault rifle.

In court documents and a subsequent detention hearing, law enforcement painted a more dire picture of Ahmadou than the single gun charge would suggest. Ahmadou, law enforcement officials argued, was a danger to the community who had "expressed a desire to travel overseas for both education purposes and potentially for violent jihad."

The charges against Ahmadou have not been reported and, to date, prosecutors have been reluctant to say much about the case. The Justice Department issued no press release about Ahmadou's arrest and the U.S. Attorney's Office in Houston did not respond to a request for comment.

Ahmadou's attorneys also declined a request for comment but in court, public defender Philip Gallagher argued that his client had not "actually not discussed ever doing anything harmful to anyone within the United States" and that, despite at times 24-hour surveillance on Ahmadou by law enforcement, agents had little to show by way of a danger to the community from him.

Alsaqli, a student who had expressed support for jihadist groups on social media, drove to the Naval base early one morning in May 2020 and shot at a guard before security personnel returned fire and killed him. No one was killed in the attack besides Alsaqli and a ballistic vest saved the life of the sailor he shot in the chest.

Ahmadou's name first surfaced when FBI agents went through Alsaqli's phone in the wake of the Corpus Christi base shooting and found he'd sent a message to Ahmadou and a group of roughly eight people through the encrypted WhatsApp messaging app on the day of the attack.

FBI agents combing through Alsaqli's text and social media accounts learned that the two men, both studying in Texas colleges, had been in communication prior to the attack. Prosecutors say Ahmadou would text Alsaqli Quranic verses and at one point had asked him through an intermediary about "an elephant in the room concerning jihad." Ahmadou, an FBI agent testified during a recent detention hearing, "wanted to know if he needed parents' permission to commit jihad."

After the FBI learned of Ahmadou's links to the Corpus Christi shooter, agents approached him through an unnamed "paid confidential source," who secretly recorded conversations with the Nigerian man and reported on his activities to the FBI.

The recordings, detailed by law enforcement in court, allegedly show Ahmadou citing a speech by Anwar al-Awlak, an al Qaeda preacher killed in a U.S. drone strike in Yemen after he attracted a following of English-speaking extremists, calling for would-be jihadists to train with firearms as his motivation to learn more about guns.

Agents also allegedly found Ahmadou downloaded sermons by ISIS spokesman Abu Mohammad al-Adnani, who issued a 2014 call for ISIS followers in the West to kill non-Muslims.

Throughout his conversations with the FBI's informant, Ahmadou allegedly expressed a desire to "travel to Egypt, to Palestine, to Israel and Gaza," particularly in May 2021 as fighting between Israeli forces and

the terrorist group Hamas reached a peak in order “to study” and “travel to Gaza to possibly further commit violent jihad,” according to testimony from an FBI agent assigned to the case.

That month, Ahmadou allegedly traveled to a Houston-area gun range along with the FBI’s confidential source, where undercover FBI agents waiting at the range took photographs and observed him firing two hand guns and an AR-15 assault rifle, according to a criminal complaint.

Agents grew concerned, however, when Ahmadou allegedly expressed interest in receiving more intensive weapons training, including a sniper course and a training regimen that would teach him how to shoot targets while moving. Shortly afterwards, agents arrested Ahmadou and charged him with illegal possession of a firearm for his time at the firing range. Under federal law, non-immigrant visa holders are forbidden from possessing firearms.

Ahmadou has pleaded not guilty. A federal judge ruled him a potential flight risk and a possible danger to the community due to his foreign ties and alleged support of ISIS and ordered him detained pending a trial in January. Court records show the prosecutors requested a classification information security officer assigned to the case and that the prosecution will rely upon classified information to try the case.

When asked at a detention hearing in July whether Ahmadou had plans for any violence in the U.S., a FBI agent testified that the Bureau was “still investigating at this time.”

[Return to Top](#)

Suspicious, Unusual

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	12/09 Jailed journalists reach record high
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/09/world/americas/jailed-journalists-worldwide.html
GIST	<p>Increased government intolerance of independent reporting pushed the number of imprisoned journalists worldwide to a record high of 293 this year, more than a quarter of them in China alone, a monitoring group said in an annual survey released on Thursday.</p> <p>The total is up from 280 in 2020 and is the sixth consecutive annual record for the number of jailed journalists worldwide as tallied by the monitoring group, the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists. Since the group established the database of imprisonments in 1992, it has become a global benchmark for measuring repression of journalists.</p> <p>Joel Simon, the group’s executive director, and Arlene Getz, its editorial director, said in releasing the survey that the relentless climb in the number of jailed journalists reflected differing circumstances by country, but that a common denominator was an increasing unwillingness among authoritarian governments to abide the public release of information that they considered a threat.</p> <p>“The number reflects two inextricable challenges — governments are determined to control and manage information, and they are increasingly brazen in their efforts to do so,” Mr. Simon said. “Imprisoning journalists for reporting the news is the hallmark of an authoritarian regime.”</p> <p>The survey, which counted those imprisoned as of Dec. 1, offered a counterpoint to China’s aggressive efforts aimed at showcasing itself for the Beijing Winter Olympics in February and portraying the ruling Communist Party as a defender of democratic liberties.</p> <p>Fifty journalists are known to be imprisoned by China, the survey found, more than anywhere else, and for the first time including journalists from Hong Kong, the Chinese territory subjected to a harsh security law in 2020 after pro-democracy protests there.</p>

No. 2 this year is Myanmar, where a military junta seized power in February, arrested many reporters and imprisoned at least 26. Egypt with 25, Vietnam, 23, and Belarus, 19, round out the top five on the survey list, followed by Turkey, 18, Eritrea, 16, Saudi Arabia and Russia, both 14, and Iran, 9.

Ms. Getz acknowledged that some countries that historically have been among the top jailers of journalists defied the trend. Turkey, for example, which was No. 1 in 2018, receded in the rankings after its release of 20 journalists last year.

But in Turkey's case, its president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, effectively silenced the domestic media in a crackdown that followed the failed 2016 coup. Many journalists have shifted to other professions, while others awaiting prosecution have been paroled.

Ms. Getz said that "it would be naïve to see lower prisoner numbers as a sign of a change of heart toward the press."

No journalist has been imprisoned in North America as of Dec. 1, the group said, but it noted that the [U.S. Press Freedom Tracker](#), a collaboration of the group and other press advocacy organizations, reported at least 56 arrests and detentions of journalists across the United States this year, 86 percent of them during protests. That total nearly equals the totals for 2017, 2018 and 2019 combined.

The group also reported that the number of journalists killed worldwide in retaliation for their work totaled at least 19 this year as of Dec. 1, compared with 22 for all of 2020. Three other journalists were killed this year while reporting from conflict zones, the group said, and two others were killed covering protests or street clashes.

Mexico remained the deadliest country for reporters in the Western Hemisphere, according to the group, with three people killed in retribution for their reporting. The group said it was investigating six other killings of reporters in Mexico to determine the motives of the killers.

India was home to the highest number of journalists killed in retribution for their reporting — four — and a fifth was killed covering a protest, the group said.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	12/08 UW seismologists: concern on ShakeAlert
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/disaster/uw-seismologists-raise-concern-about-shakealert-earthquake-warning-system/281-6840f7c3-af4d-47fe-b187-6890eba95d27
GIST	<p>Seismologists at the University of Washington are concerned that major population centers like Seattle and Tacoma may not receive timely warnings that shaking is coming, depending on where a massive magnitude 9 earthquake starts along the Pacific Northwest coast.</p> <p>Renate Hartog, network manager for the Pacific Northwest Seismic Network, and graduate student Mika Thompson have new recommendations based on their research.</p> <p>They ran around 30 scenarios where, during the worst type of quake to hit the Northwest, if the level of the new ShakeAlert system remains set too high to avoid nuisance notifications of smaller non-damaging quakes, the system may not be able to correctly send out notifications that shaking is heading to certain areas, in some cases until after the shaking had already reached those areas. They recommend the shaking equivalent be set to detect smaller earthquakes below a magnitude 3.</p> <p>The Cascadia Subduction Zone is a massive earthquake fault that runs for hundreds of miles off the Northwest coast. It begins off Cape Mendocino, California, and runs north past all of Oregon and Washington, then ends off the coast of Canada's Vancouver Island.</p> <p>While most think of earthquakes and epicenters as coming from a compact area, scientists expect the Cascadia Subduction Zone would tear open and progress like ripping a sheet, a massive quake lasting</p>

	<p>around five minutes. It could start anywhere along the fault, beginning at one end or the other, or even start in the middle and propagate in two directions.</p> <p>Hartog showed KING 5 one scenario where an earthquake begins west of Eugene, Oregon, and results in a quake the system would not initially read as being large enough to generate shaking in the population centers much further north.</p> <p>“Because this rupture takes so long to evolve, the system doesn’t recognize that it’s a really large earthquake soon enough to actually give a warning to Seattle,” explained Hartog.</p> <p>An academic paper on the subject is expected to be presented next week at the American Geophysical Union fall meeting.</p> <p>The UW was part of the ShakeAlert development. Yet, the system got its start in southern California, where there is no subduction zone. While California suffers more frequent and large devastating earthquakes, much of the state is subject to smaller and more frequent non-damaging quake events, which means the ShakeAlert level is set at the higher level to avoid nuisance alerts.</p> <p>The Cascadia Subduction Zone last shook nearly 322 years ago in the year 1700.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	12/08 Quake swarm rattles off Oregon coast
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/10-earthquakes-occur-off-oregon-coast/FYF7U67QQJCTRPYHTYWQDQGEM4/
GIST	<p>PORTLAND, Ore. — Nearly 250 miles west of Newport, Oregon, a place called the Blanco Fracture Zone has produced more than 60 earthquakes in 36 hours.</p> <p>“About 20 of them, oh, we just had another one just now, about 21 of them are over magnitude 4.7,” said Chris Goldfinger of Oregon State University.</p> <p>Goldfinger said offshore swarms of earthquakes happen around once a year.</p> <p>“They’re called strike slip earthquakes where the two blocks move side by side, so because there’s not a lot of vertical motion, they don’t generate tsunamis,” he said.</p> <p>Harold Tobin leads the Pacific Northwest Seismic Network at the University of Washington.</p> <p>He points out the Blanco Fracture Zone is a long way from the Cascadia Subduction Zone, which is what we worry about for a major quake around Seattle.</p> <p>“Our best science says that there’s no way that stress is transferred over, as some people have speculated, to the big one,” Tobin said.</p> <p>Still, any seismic event is a reminder that we live in earthquake country and should be prepared.</p> <p>“We always have the risk of a substantial earthquake that is damaging but I don’t think that risk is different in the Pacific Northwest today than it was two days ago,” Tobin said.</p> <p>Emergency managers now ask people to be “two weeks ready,” which means having enough supplies to be on your own for two weeks.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	12/08 ‘It’s a different beast’: fentanyl deaths rise
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/dec/08/us-fentanyl-deaths-narcan-roger-crystal

GIST

Deaths from fentanyl will continue to rise and overdoses may be increasingly difficult to battle in the US, said Roger Crystal, who helped develop Narcan nasal spray, an easy-to-use medication that reverses overdoses.

The overdose crisis that killed more than 100,000 Americans in one year is “all about fentanyl”, Crystal said – and it’s only going to get worse.

People who have never used opioids before are dying from a single fatal encounter with fentanyl.

Those who are overdosing from fentanyl have a shorter window of time to be saved and may need additional doses of the medication.

“Fentanyl is an opioid, but it’s a different beast entirely. It acts faster, it’s much stronger, and it lasts longer,” Crystal told the Guardian. That means overdose reversals need to happen faster, and multiple doses of naloxone may be needed. Sometimes, he said, a person is revived with one dose, but falls back into an overdose again because of fentanyl’s long-lasting effects.

Frequently, people don’t realize they have taken fentanyl, because it’s mixed in with other drugs or it’s [pressed to look like legitimate prescription pills](#). And even stronger synthetic opioids – like carfentanil, which is [100 times](#) more potent than fentanyl – are also entering the market. “I call it supercharged fentanyl,” Crystal said. “It’s just frightening and staggering.”

Narcan is an inhalable form of naloxone, which was first patented in 1961. Now naloxone is available as a generic, but Narcan nasal spray is patented.

This year, harm reduction organizations faced a [huge increase in the cost](#) of life-saving naloxone treatments. The pharmaceutical company Pfizer has provided the organizations with injectable naloxone at a very low cost, but due to manufacturing problems, had to cut back on supply for several months.

The other available naloxone options are 15 to 30 times more expensive. Harm-reduction advocates unsuccessfully called on companies like Emergent BioSolutions, the company that now makes Narcan, to lower the price temporarily as organizations working on the front lines of the opioid crisis witnessed thousands more deaths than the year before.

Crystal, who is the CEO of Opiant Pharmaceuticals, rejected the idea that Narcan’s price tag is making it difficult to save lives. “How cheap do you want a life-saving drug to be?” he argued.

Yet he acknowledged the growing force of the crisis in the United States, which is an international leader in [opioid use](#) and [overdose deaths](#).

Right now, most fentanyl comes into the US from Mexico or China. But the synthetic opioid can be made in a lab anywhere, making it difficult for authorities to limit the supply – unlike, for instance, heroin, which is sourced from opium poppies that need to be grown.

“Fentanyl doesn’t have to come from overseas; we could make it here in the US. And it wouldn’t take much more than a competent chemist to be able to do so,” Crystal said. For now, it’s been cheaper to import it, but simply cracking down on imports would not be enough to eradicate the drug.

Instead, advocates are calling for better support – including treatment options for those with substance use disorder, inexpensive test strips to detect the presence of fentanyl, and a wide-scale, steady supply of affordable overdose-reversing medication.

Supervised injection sites, where naloxone can be administered immediately, and a [safe supply](#) for those with substance use disorder, would also cut down on countless deaths, researchers say.

	<p>Before working in the pharmaceutical industry, Crystal worked as a surgeon in London, and he saw many of the lasting complications of the opioid crisis.</p> <p>“You can do, as the surgeon, the most fantastic surgical repair of a patient and really feel you’ve made a huge difference in saving their life,” he said. “But the sad fact is, the same patients would still come back to the ER later with something else, and then that made me realize, well, we’re not really treating the actual problem here.”</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	12/08 Lead poisoning crisis impacting children
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/dec/08/lead-poisoning-crisis-us-children
GIST	<p>Nine-year-old Turokk Dow loves spelling, airplanes and basketball. He is learning to read and write in his third grade classroom.</p> <p>But suffering from extreme blood lead poisoning at age 3 – with lead levels nearly ten times the EPA action level – has hugely exacerbated the already-substantial challenges in his young life.</p> <p>As a toddler, he had to be rushed to the hospital and started on months of “chelation” treatments to soak up the lead in his body. These involved making him swallow a liquid that his mom said “smelled and tasted like rotten eggs”.</p> <p>“His levels were so high that lead actually got stored in his muscle and his bone,” said his mother, Nette Catholdi-Dow, who now works as an advocate against lead poisoning at the Childhood Lead Action Project in Rhode Island.</p> <p>She said it was only last year, five years after the poison was first detected, that his lead levels dropped to the single digits, getting close to the EPA’s action level of 5 micrograms per deciliter. He still does not have the ability to hold a conversation, and his mother will always wonder how much the lead contributed to his many learning challenges.</p> <p>“It was scary,” said Catholdi-Dow, who said the lead came from paint at her hundred-year-old house in the town of Attleboro. “At first I felt like I did something wrong or didn’t keep him safe. Guilt is a big part of it for parents.”</p> <p>Turokk Dow is one of about 87,000 young children who are diagnosed with lead poisoning in the US each year, more than three decades after the neurotoxin was banned as an ingredient in paint, gasoline and water pipes. Today, lead lingers in houses and apartments, yards and water lines, and wherever states and communities ramp up testing, it becomes clear that the nation’s lead problem is worse than we realized, experts say.</p> <p>A study published in JAMA Pediatrics this fall suggested that more than half of all US children have detectable levels of lead in their blood – and that elevated blood lead levels were closely associated with race, poverty and living in older housing. Black children are particularly at risk.</p> <p>“Most American children are exposed to lead, a substance that is not safe at any level,” said co-author Dr Harvey Kaufman, a senior medical director at Quest Diagnostics, which led the study. According to the CDC, “[e]ven low levels of lead in blood have been shown to negatively affect a child’s intelligence, ability to pay attention, and academic achievement.”</p> <p>“This is an entire United States issue,” Kaufman said. “It really is everywhere.”</p> <p>The nation’s programs to detect lead before it poisons children and to identify those who have been exposed are astoundingly slipshod.</p>

“We literally are using the blood of our children as detectors of environmental contamination,” said Dr Mona Hanna-Attisha, the pediatrician who helped to expose the drinking water crisis in Flint, Michigan.

States like Rhode Island, which requires all children to get two screenings for lead poisoning by age three, are investing in early detection of lead poisoning. But such initiatives also show the difficulty of removing the toxin from our everyday environments.

Without robust testing, states risk not knowing how bad their lead problem is and leaving sick children behind. “The lead epidemic is the longest-running epidemic in our country,” said Liz Colón, a Rhode Island woman whose son suffered severe lead poisoning two decades ago and who has since become a national advocate for solving the problem.

“There are little Flint, Michigans everywhere,” she said. “But if you don’t test for it, it’s like it doesn’t exist.”

‘A cloud between being sick and being sad’

Because of decades of pressure from the parents and organizers who run the Children’s Lead Action Program, Rhode Island is doing far more testing of children’s blood than most states in the nation.

What health advocates there have discovered is that lead contamination, often thought of as a thing of the past, persists in many communities, with hundreds of new cases of poisoned children discovered every year.

Terri Wright, who grew up in public housing in Providence, says she doesn’t know whether the lead that poisoned her came from the peeling paint or the lead water pipes in her building. But she learned first-hand how the substance can leave lasting marks on a young person’s life.

“I remember spending my childhood in this cloud between being sick and being sad,” said Wright, 51, who still suffers from the social anxiety she developed from being too weak and feverish to play with other children. Today, she does not trust the tap water in Providence, and buys six to eight cases of bottled water for her family every week.

Wright recently joined dozens of Rhode Island activists on the steps of the state capitol, demanding the replacement all the lead pipes in the state’s aging housing stock.

In all of Rhode Island, there are still an estimated 100,000 lead water service lines in use in private houses. And each year about 600 children in the state are discovered to have blood lead levels high enough to meet the EPA intervention levels.

However, children in Rhode Island may be more fortunate than those in other states, where huge numbers of cases are believed to go undetected.

In California, for example, a [2020 report](#) found that 1.4 million low-income children who were supposed to receive testing never got checked for blood poisoning. In some states, like New York, testing of all children is required, but there is often insufficient followup. A study by the [New York City comptroller found](#) that 9,000 rental buildings where children tested positive for blood poisoning were never inspected for lead, resulting in additional children being poisoned.

“As a society, we’re losing IQ points due to lead exposure,” said Tom Neltner of the Environmental Defense Fund. “In an individual child, you are not going to see it. But statistically we see the child is more likely to have behavior problems, to have learning problems, to have lower income. Other studies indicate that they’re more likely to be arrested, more likely to commit violent behavior – all the things we really don’t want in the next generation.”

Children all across the nation are at risk. Lead water pipes are still found in millions of homes in all 50 states, a [study](#) by the Natural Resources Defense Council found.

Liz Colón has three sons, one of whom suffered from hugely elevated blood lead levels as an infant. Thanks to state health programs that helped her identify his problem, she was able to tutor him as a child to make up for any developmental deficits the lead may have caused.

But today when she looks at her sons, Colón thinks she may see slight differences that lead may have contributed to.

“My son who was lead poisoned has impulse control issues and can be aggressive,” she said, adding that he has never gotten into trouble. “Those are the very subtleties of lead poisoning.”

‘It all comes down to race and class’

As a former state case manager who now works with Rhode Island’s Childhood Lead Action Project, Elizabeth Sorriano has seen the devastation of lead poisoning with her own eyes. She often worked with children who were two or three years old and could not yet speak and others who could not focus or follow their parents’ instructions.

She saw that interventions – such as getting rid of the lead and providing educational support – could make huge improvements in their lives.

“All these things can create misery for a young child that is growing up with all these issues,” she said. “It is something that is preventable. We shouldn’t be dealing with this.”

A 2017 Pew Charitable Trust study found that taking measures to prevent lead exposure for children could provide huge economic benefits to society – up to \$84bn a year in increased earnings and savings.

And yet, poorer communities may lack the funding necessary to take on such prevention and remediation programs. While President Biden has made environmental justice a pillar of his administration, the final version of the infrastructure bill contains \$15bn for removal of lead water pipes – much less than the \$45bn originally proposed.

The study published in JAMA found that children living in areas with the highest levels of poverty were two and a half times as likely to suffer blood poisoning.

Colón said lead poisoning tends to be ignored because it has far higher incidence in poorer neighborhoods of color, where people tend to live in older housing.

“It all comes down to race and class,” she said. “Lead was known as this dirty four-letter word. What people [associate] lead with is dirty people, who don’t clean their house and have kids just sitting around eating paint chips. It’s that stigma that continues to bring our society down.”

Turokk Dow was diagnosed with autism at 18 monthsold, a condition which his mother said predated the lead poisoning. But she believes the poisoning affected her son’s speech and gave him an upset stomach that suppressed his appetite for years.

The treatments for lead poisoning were also torturous. In addition to having to be force-fed the horrible sulfuric medicine, he had to be held down so that doctors could do intravenous blood tests every three months for years.

Catholdi-Dow will never know how much of his speech delays were caused by the lead poisoning. But she said that as soon as his lead levels came down, his speech and his eating improved markedly. Today, he has learned to ask for things that he wants and can say a few sentences.

Catholdi-Dow said she would like to see more education offered to parents – and more steps to prevent this sort of poisoning from ever happening.

	“They’re not doing anything until the child gets poisoned,” said Catholdi-Dow. “There should have been more testing – or at least more questioning of the kind of housing we were living in.”
Return to Top	

Crime, Criminals

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	12/08 WSP: copper thefts King Co. freeways
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/wsp-looking-witnesses-copper-thefts-along-king-county-freeways/NOBXW2PWWJHUJFVRI7MOPBWFTQ/
GIST	<p>KING COUNTY, Wash. — State patrol detectives are asking for witnesses to copper thefts from Department of Transportation junction boxes along freeways in King County.</p> <p>The incidents happened along SR 167 and SR 518 during the day. Detectives say the thefts may look like someone is working but is actually stealing the copper.</p> <p>WSP estimates the damage is over \$100,000.</p> <p>Troopers arrested two suspects in the process of sealing copper wires Dec. 7 on SR 509. The suspects were interviewed and detectives were not able to establish a link to the other copper thefts.</p> <p>Anyone with information should contact WSP.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	12/08 Federal Way police: man shot, killed
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/police-man-shot-killed-in-federal-way-parking-lot
GIST	<p>FEDERAL WAY, Wash. — Authorities are investigating a fatal shooting in Federal Way Wednesday night after a man was killed in a parking lot.</p> <p>Officers responded to the 1400 block of South 348th Street for reports of a shooting at about 9:45 p.m. A man was found in the parking lot suffering from gunshot wounds, police said. Emergency crews started life-saving efforts, but he was pronounced dead at the scene.</p> <p>Detectives are investigating the shooting, but it appears to be targeted and not a random act, police said.</p> <p>Anyone with information on the shooting is encouraged to call the Federal Way Police Department at 253-835-2121.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	12/08 Pierce Co. faces rise vehicle thefts
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/pierce-county-sees-rise-in-car-thefts-as-frustration-grows
GIST	<p>LAKEWOOD, Wash. - New numbers show car and truck thefts in Pierce County continue to be a huge problem, leaving business owners frustrated as police are restricted on how to respond by new laws.</p> <p>The Puget Sound Auto Theft Task Force says 798 vehicles were stolen in November, which is two more cars than October and more than double the number from the same time last year.</p> <p>Over the Thanksgiving weekend, 43 cars were stolen in just four days.</p> <p>One auto shop service manager who had two vehicles stolen says the new law limiting officers from pursuing car theft suspects needs to be changed.</p>

Surveillance video shows a burglar stealing keys from Rolf's Import Auto Service in Lakewood on Nov. 24.

Service Manager Kassandra Lane said a man and a second suspect stole a customer's white 2016 Mercedes c class sedan and a clearly-marked company van that they crashed through a fence.

The Lakewood police chief was on patrol and responded to the break-in and told Lane that his officers had spotted her stolen van, however, they weren't able to make an arrest because of new policing laws that went into effect earlier this year.

"To think that you could have your company van driving down the street with two criminals that have pockets full of your clients keys totaling probably somewhere near a million dollars worth of inventory and to be told, 'No, we can't do anything. They're running and we have to let them go' was probably the saddest thing I've seen in a couple of really good officer's eyes in my experience because I don't deal with the law every day," Lane said.

She was stunned to hear that officers couldn't stop the thieves and return her van and feels the community doesn't fully understand the impact the new policing laws are having on protecting people and their property.

"It puts a lot of people at risk. It puts people in danger. It's escalating. The crime, I think daily, because as the criminals advance in things they are doing, they know what they can do and what they can't do," Lane said.

To protect from future break-ins from happening again, Lane has since doubled the number of cameras, floodlights and security monitoring systems at their shop.

If you can identify the suspect, please contact Lakewood Police at [\(253\) 830-5000](tel:2538305000) or submit an anonymous tip to Crime Stoppers of Tacoma-Pierce County by calling 1-800-222-TIPS or text the info through the P3 Tips App on your cell phone.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	12/08 Where is Oakley Carlson?
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/where-is-oakley-carlson-search-amps-up-for-missing-5-year-old-as-parents-remain-uncooperative
GIST	<p>OAKVILLE, Wash. - Wednesday marks the second of a massive search for 5-year-old Oakley Carlson.</p> <p>Neighbors said they had not seen Oakley in quite some time. One neighbor said they noticed the school bus had stopped coming around. According to the Grays Harbor Undersheriff, a concerned citizen called in a welfare check, which led to her being reported missing.</p> <p>On Dec. 8, the search was centered around her home in Oakville. The Grays Harbor Sheriff's Office says Oakley's parents, Jordan Bowers and Andrew Carlson, remain uncooperative about the little girl's whereabouts and the time frame of when she went missing.</p> <p>Around seven different agencies are working on the case. Crews were back on the property on Wednesday, canvassing and digging around the 300 acres that come with the home.</p> <p>While the search goes on, it's heartache and anger for those who love Oakley.</p> <p>"It's hard to find time to be sad when I am so angry," Jamie Jo Hiles said, Oakley's former foster parent.</p> <p>Jamie Jo and Erik Hiles were both Oakley's foster parents and had her for almost three years before the state and the courts decided to give Oakley back to her biological parents in 2019.</p>

Now those parents, Bowers and Carlson, are behind bars [facing manslaughter charges](#).

"We are absolutely holding out all hope that we will locate Oakley alive. We have to realize the possibility that she is deceased," Undersheriff Brad Johansson said.

The mystery of it all was made worse with investigators now looking into a fire that happened at the couple's home in mid-November. A GoFundMe account was set up by a friend of the couple, showing the damage to the home. It explained the parents didn't call 911 because they couldn't find their phones.

"It's unusual that a fire department wasn't called, I would say," Johansson said.

But Jamie Jo did call the Department of Children Youth and Families (DCYF) right before Thanksgiving to express concerns about Oakley when she saw the GoFundme account. The account is no longer active.

"If no one has seen her, what could have happened to her? Was it the fire? Was it something else," Jamie Jo asked.

The foster parents say they called DCYF not just last month, but in January of 2021 when they became suspicious after getting some news about Oakley.

"I am so disappointed. What a failure of the state of Washington. What a failure for those kids," Jamie Jo said.

Other children were removed from Bowers and Carlson's home and are being watched by others.

The Grays Harbor Sheriff's Office said [they only found out about Oakley two days ago](#) when an associate of Bowers and Carlson called to say they had not seen Oakley in a while.

"I knew the father in high school and the person he is now is not the person he was at all in high school," Erik Hiles said.

Carlson is a former Aberdeen Police Officer. He was decommissioned as an officer in 2017 for making false and misleading statements.

Erik believes the couple are using drugs. When the state gave Oakley back to the couple in 2019, the Hiles' were concerned for Oakley's safety.

The Hiles' are in shock over the fallout, but the most difficult thing right now is not knowing what happened to the little girl they always wanted to adopt.

"She was so kind and smart, she loved to read. She would fall asleep with books in her bed," Jamie Jo said. "It was always 'one more book.' How can you say no to that?" Erik said.

FOX 13 reached out to DCYF, but the department said they cannot comment about the case.

FOX 13 also filed public disclosure requests, hoping to uncover how DCYF handled Oakley's case.

Anyone with [information on Oakley or her whereabouts](#) is urged to call the sheriff's office at (360) 533-8765 and ask to speak to a deputy, or call Detective Sgt. Paul Logan at (360) 964-1729 or email sodetectives@co.grays-harbor.wa.us. Deputies ask that if you've seen her within the last year to give them a call.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	12/08 Scott Peterson resented to life prison
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/scott-peterson-sentence-life-prison-no-parole/

Scott Peterson was re-sentenced by a San Mateo County Superior Court judge on Wednesday to life in prison without parole for the 2002 slaying of his wife and the couple's unborn son, Connor. The now 49-year-old has spent nearly two decades on death row for the crime.

Peterson was convicted in the San Mateo court in 2004 after his trial was moved from Stanislaus County due to the massive pretrial publicity that followed Laci's disappearance on Christmas Eve 2002 and ensuing search.

Investigators say Peterson — who was having an affair at the time — took the body of his pregnant wife from their Modesto home and dumped her remains from his fishing boat into the San Francisco Bay, where they surfaced months later. Appearing on CBS News' "48 Hours" in May, former Modesto police detective Jon Buehler [said](#) the evidence in the case all still points to this theory.

"There's nothing that has come out to change my view that Scott got a fair trial and that Scott is the one who killed Laci," Buehler said.

Peterson's death sentence was [overturned](#) on appeal by the California Supreme Court in August 2020 after the court ruled that the jury wasn't properly screened for bias against the death penalty, The Associated Press [reported](#). Peterson has insisted that he is innocent.

Stanislaus County District Attorney Birgit Fladager, who was one of three prosecutors in Peterson's trial, opted this time to seek life without parole.

Laci's family speaks in court

Amy Rocha, Laci's sister, made an emotional plea to the court on Wednesday before the sentence was announced. Judge Anne-Christine Massullo had issued a pre-hearing order allotting 16 seats in the courtroom for the friends and family of Laci in the jury box, facing Peterson.

"It's been 19 years and not a day has gone by that I don't think about my sister and the life she could have had and the life we could have all had with Connor," Rocha said. "I always think of how unfair it is that I don't have a sister anymore and I feel so cheated that I don't have that special relationship that others have. You took that away from me."

"Because of you, our holidays have never been the same," she continued. "Every Christmas Eve I realize the nightmare we still all live in now. After becoming a mom myself I think of how she was robbed of that most wonderful experience. She would have been the best mom. You have broken all of our hearts."

Laci's brother, Brent Rocha, also spoke. "There are no words able to express the pain associated with not being able to experience life together," he said. "The sociopathic actions of Scott Peterson and the disregard for Laci and Connor's lives warrant the most severe punishment. He has shown absolutely no remorse and continues not to accept responsibility for his actions."

Sharon Rocha, Laci's mom, concluded the family's statements.

"I think about Laci every single day," she said. "She would have been 46 years old today, but she'll always be 27 to me. I miss her so much. I miss her friendship. I miss her laughter. I miss her personality, her humor, her companionship. I miss my daughter."

Scott's family also in court

Seats for 16 members of Peterson's friends and family — who entered the courthouse as a group — were reserved elsewhere in the courtroom. Janey Peterson, his sister-in-law, said she believes he is innocent. A room in her family business is lined with maps, photos and notes to aid in her efforts to free him.

"The justice system has failed here, and a lot of aspects have failed," she told "48 Hours." "And it started with the Modesto Police Department. And it started with the fact that they didn't follow up on evidence that showed Laci was alive the morning of December 24."

	Massullo will also decide if Peterson gets a new trial on the murder counts after a February 2022 hearing on his claims of juror misconduct at the original trial. Peterson's legal team is arguing that one juror lied during the jury selection process.
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	12/08 Everett police arrest prolific burglar
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/prolific-burglar-arrested-everett-facing-35-charges/XK7R2TPB7RF2DFO4QMAUZSPYY/
GIST	<p>Everett police said they arrested a man suspected to be a “prolific” burglar who’s responsible for numerous crimes in south Everett.</p> <p>According to a post on the police department’s Facebook page, over the last several months, there have been at least 30 burglary or malicious mischief cases. In each case, a windowpane at a home would be removed or shot with a BB gun, and then the house would be burglarized.</p> <p>Everett police property crimes detectives said they believed the cases were linked and investigated each one to find the suspect.</p> <p>Detectives identified a U-Haul truck that was rented by the suspect and were able to find where the man was staying.</p> <p>A search warrant was served at his home and the man was arrested. Police said he confessed to 15 burglaries.</p> <p>Everett police officers said with the man’s confession and evidence found in his home, they have potentially solved numerous cases and the man is facing 35 criminal charges.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	12/08 Tukwila: teen, toddler injured in shooting
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3272939/two-minors-in-critical-condition-after-tukwila-shooting/
GIST	<p>A teenage boy and a toddler are in the hospital after they were shot in Tukwila early Wednesday.</p> <p>Tukwila police said that shortly after 1 a.m., officers were called to the area of Tukwila International Boulevard and South 144th Street for a report of shots fired.</p> <p>Officers found evidence of a shooting at the scene, but no victims were located.</p> <p>A short time later, officers were told that two people with gunshot wounds had arrived at St. Anne Hospital in Burien. Both were in critical condition and were transferred to Harborview Medical Center.</p> <p>A 17-year-old boy is in serious condition and a 2-year-old is in critical condition, said Susan Gregg, director of media relations for UW Medicine.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	12/08 US: El Salvador secret deal w/violent gangs
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/dec/08/el-salvador-us-gang-leaders-truce
GIST	<p>The US has accused the government of El Salvador president Nayib Bukele of secretly negotiating a truce with leaders of the country’s feared MS-13 and Barrio 18 street gangs.</p> <p>The explosive accusation on Wednesday cuts to the heart of one of Bukele’s most highly touted successes in office: a plunge in the country’s murder rate.</p>

Bukele's office did not immediately respond to a request for comment. But Bukele vehemently denied similar accusations when they were reported in August 2020 by the local news site El Faro.

The US Treasury announcement came as it designated two officials from Bukele's government for financial sanctions.

The two officials accused of negotiating directly with the gang leaders were Osiris Luna Meza, chief of the Salvadoran penal system and vice-minister of justice and public security, and Carlos Amílcar Marroquín Chica, chairman of the Social Fabric Reconstruction Unit.

In 2020, Bukele's administration "provided financial incentives to Salvadoran gangs MS-13 and 18th Street Gang (Barrio 18) to ensure that incidents of gang violence and the number of confirmed homicides remained low", the treasury statement said. "Over the course of these negotiations with Luna and Marroquín, gang leadership also agreed to provide political support to the Nuevas Ideas political party in upcoming elections."

Bukele's New Ideas party won legislative elections earlier this year in a landslide, giving it control of El Salvador's congress.

The announcement comes as a number of former officials from previous administrations are being prosecuted for negotiating a similar pact with the gangs.

Former attorney general Raul Melara said he would investigate the El Faro report at the time, but when Bukele's party took over congress, the new lawmakers ousted Melara and replaced him with someone friendly with Bukele.

The US treasury said that an investigation into government officials and gang leaders revealed the secret negotiations. Luna and Marroquin allegedly "led, facilitated and organized a number of secret meetings involving incarcerated gang leaders, in which known gang members were allowed to enter the prison facilities and meet with senior gang leadership".

In addition to financial benefits for the gang members, incarcerated leaders received special treatment in the prisons, including access to mobile phones and sex workers. It said Luna also negotiated support from MS-13 and Barrio 18 gangs for Bukele's national quarantine during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The designations Wednesday mean that any assets Luna and Marroquín have in the United States are blocked and US citizens are prohibited from any transactions with Luna and Marroquín.

The revelations are sure to raise tensions between Bukele and the Biden administration. After the new congress removed the attorney general and the justices of the constitutional chamber of the supreme court in May, the US government expressed concern over the direction of the country.

The US Agency for International Development announced it would shift aid from government agencies in El Salvador to nongovernmental organizations. The head of that agency, Samantha Power, then went to El Salvador and gave a speech about the fragility of democracy.

The new attorney general in June announced the government was cancelling the Organization of American States anti-corruption mission in El Salvador.

In May and July, [the US government published lists of allegedly corrupt officials in Central America](#) that included the name of Bukele's chief of staff, Carolina Recinos.

Bukele enjoys extremely high popularity. He stepped into a political vacuum left by discredited traditional parties from the left and right who had left a legacy of corruption.

HEADLINE	12/07 DOC: Covid outbreak Monroe facility
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/health/coronavirus/107-new-cases-of-covid-19-reported-at-monroe-correctional-facility/281-dc533a15-38e4-4266-acfc-9be8859c03ec
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — The Washington State Department of Corrections (DOC) said more than 100 people contracted COVID-19 at a facility in Monroe.</p> <p>There are 107 new coronavirus cases reported in the past 30 days at the Monroe Correctional Complex in the Twin Rivers Unit.</p> <p>The total number of confirmed cases at that facility is 674.</p> <p>The DOC keeps a "Significant Event Timeline" on its website of COVID-19 outbreaks.</p> <p>The last significant event was reported at the Cedar Creek Corrections Center in Littlerock, where 94 inmates had COVID-19.</p> <p>The facility, south of Olympia, is the same place 32-year-old Garrett Young escaped by digging under a fence. Young was arrested in the Bellingham area days later.</p> <p>Young was temporarily housed with about 50 other inmates in a gym at the corrections facility due to a COVID-19 outbreak. It's believed Young went out to use a portable toilet in the yard and never returned.</p> <p>Prior to Young's escape, inmates were allowed to leave the gym without having to get permission.</p> <p>Cedar Creek Corrections Center is considered a minimum-security facility. The prison is only surrounded by one set of fences. Most other state facilities have two fences.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	12/08 Cartels hiring kids to be hitmen
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/jgmpmy/mexico-drug-cartels-recruit-children-to-kill
GIST	<p>TIJUANA, Mexico — Juan was 15 when he was recruited by a drug cartel during his first semester of high school to sell methamphetamine. Less than a year later, older members of the cartel came to him after school with a new assignment: They gave him a gun and photos of a rival cartel member who was selling drugs on their turf.</p> <p>“I went to the place I was told,” he said quietly, fidgeting in his chair. “There, I killed him.”</p> <p>It wasn’t even his first kill for the cartel, but after he became a full-fledged “sicario,” or assassin, Juan said that he “felt different from the others” and that he “didn’t want [the other students] to know what I did after school.”</p> <p>“It became normal. No one knew anything, not my family, no one,” Juan told VICE World News in an interview at the Tijuana youth facility.</p> <p>Now 18, Juan, whose name has been changed, is in a youth correctional facility and is soon to be released after spending two years behind bars for being caught for killing a member of a rival cartel. His case exemplifies a worrying trend in Mexico’s ongoing drug wars—the increasing conversion of youngsters, some as young as 10, into killers. This sicarización of children has become widespread in Mexico, and until recently the government was doing very little to stop it.</p> <p>In September, the Network for Children's Rights in Mexico (REDIM is its Spanish acronym) released a new study estimating that 30,000 children were already working for the cartels by 2019 as lookouts, street-level drug dealers, or sicarios, and another 250,000 were at risk of being recruited.</p>

This recruitment adds to the threat children already face from the violence that has engulfed Mexico: An estimated 21,000 children were murdered in Mexico between 2000 and 2019, according [to REDIM](#).

But minors aren't just showing up in the crosshairs—they're also often the ones pulling the trigger for organized crime.

Until recently, children looking for help to escape coercion by criminal gangs had few options. "In the end, most of the recruited girls, boys, adolescents could have been saved along the way if there had been any vision toward improving their living conditions," said Tania Ramírez, the director of REDIM.

The Mexican government has done little over the years to stop kids from being recruited into organized crime. In the spring of this year, the government formed a national observatory to address the issue, although it's unclear what steps it's actually taken so far. To address the problem independently, the state government of Baja California built a military academy on the outskirts of Tijuana with plans to expand, and local organizations dedicated to fighting sicarization rely on donations and international grants, or just pure grit, to continue their work.

This has urgency in Tijuana, the scene of [an ongoing street war](#) primarily between the Sinaloa Cartel, the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (or CJNG), and the remnants of the Arellano Félix Cartel, which are mostly selling methamphetamine and heroin laced with fentanyl. The battles have turned Tijuana into one of the deadliest cities in Mexico, with the country's [highest death toll](#) between 2018 and 2020.

Juan said he joined up with a cartel after his father became addicted to meth and abandoned the family. He was convicted for one murder, but Juan insinuated that he'd committed more. He said the cartel paid him a weekly wage of roughly \$250 a week. For each "event"—a word he vaguely used to refer to murder—he got a bonus of \$500 to \$750, depending on whether he worked alone or with accomplices. Juan suspected that the cartel used him and the underage hitmen in his cell as assassins because they receive shorter prison sentences.

Virginia Acosta, the psychologist at the Tijuana youth facility for the past 29 years, has seen how spiraling drug war violence has affected the teens she treats. They used to be involved in petty crimes and drug use, she said. Now it's murder and drug dealing.

"Most of the guys come precisely from broken families. Very dysfunctional, where there is a history of drug use by their parents, their siblings," said Acosta. "The pressure of the environment is decisive in their conduct."

While the Tijuana youth facility is less forbidding than typical Mexican prisons, which are often overcrowded and lawless, its barred windows and barbed-wire walls are intimidating. Its buildings are mostly barren, except for a mural depicting a young person standing between two worlds, one filled with shadows and darkness, another with light and beauty.

Juan said he plans to stay away from the cartel because he'll end up in prison for much longer if he's caught committing a crime as an adult. He hopes to finish high school and study to be a nurse or paramedic. But he's apprehensive about his release.

"Well, I'm not ready. No, the truth is that I am not prepared," he said, nervously tapping on the table as he spoke. "But I know that when I am offered a job or easy money, I will remember what I went through here and I know that I don't want to go back."

'Hugs, not bullets'

Guillermo Ruiz, the then-attorney general of Juan's state, Baja California, strolled through a spacious former prison in an arid stretch of land outside the border city of Tecate, about two hours inland from Tijuana, on a recent day in July. Ruiz—who [resigned this week](#) after a change in the governorship of the state—had a plan to prevent more children ending up like Juan. With funding from private donors, the state government will turn the massive complex [into a U.S.-style military academy](#) for teenagers at risk.

More commonly known around the region as “Titi” Ruiz, he wore an expensive-looking suit and Ray-Ban shades. His dyed black hair was slicked back, and a gold watch poked out from under his cufflinks.

Ruiz is [a larger-than-life figure](#) in Tijuana, an attorney who won human rights and environmental cases before he became a defense lawyer with a list of unsavory clients, including a member of the Arellano Félix cartel. In his first stint in public office, his background across the legal spectrum convinced him of the need to stop children from getting involved in crime.

A newly minted member of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador’s Morena party, Ruiz mirrored some of the president’s own contradictions on security policy. López Obrador won a landslide victory in 2018 on a promise to fight crime by attacking its root causes, especially poverty—a slogan he summarized as “Hugs, not bullets.”

But then he ramped up the military’s involvement by replacing the federal police with a militarized national guard, a strategy that has so far failed to stem record levels of homicides. López Obrador has concentrated social spending on just a few programs, with little attention on children at risk from the cartels, and he has cut funding to nonprofits.

Ruiz bristled at the notion that turning the abandoned prison, with its high walls and guard towers, into a military academy would reinforce the militarization model.

“It has nothing to do with that,” Ruiz said. “The entire formation of an adolescent is at risk. If they are left alone, where are they going to go?”

“This is to train them to be civil people, well-mannered, who are respectful of adult laws, of human rights,” he said. “We must shape them.”

The academy will be the state’s second, after a flagship school that opened in 2020 on the outskirts of Tijuana, and between the two the state intends to provide dormitory living and full-time classes for over a thousand teens. The goal is to open more schools to reach 7,000 children around Baja California.

Ruiz said Mexican teens who grow up with absentee parents or relatives who are addicts or criminals develop “a whispering hatred that they feel for society, toward those who caused it. It does damage.” These vulnerable kids are the ones who drug cartels target, he said, and “to rescue them, you have to get them out of there.”

The only requirement for entry is that the child has to come from an at-risk neighborhood. The school provides strict discipline and a higher-quality education than many public schools, as well as on-site psychologists and emotional counseling. It’s unclear what will happen to the project now after Ruiz stepped down on Dec. 7.

‘Cannon fodder’ for cartels

Miguel, whose name has been changed to protect his identity, completed 10th grade at the Tijuana military academy in the marginalized Natura neighborhood where he lives and returned for 11th grade.

“I’ve learned a ton, a new form of discipline,” the 16-year-old said. There was no support in Natura for children surrounded by criminal gangs. An 11-year-old boy from his church was recently murdered, perhaps by cartels.

The military academy gave Miguel a way to separate himself from his childhood friends who now work for the cartel or are addicted to drugs.

Large-scale projects like Ruiz’s are far and few between in Mexico. It’s mostly been achieved because of its reliance on a mix of state and outside funds. On a federal level, there is no concrete program for at-risk children.

López Obrador's government has instead focused on a program called "[Youths Constructing the Future](#)," which is an effort to find employment for people aged 18-29. But the president's strategy does little to help children get to that point.

Underage kids are "cannon fodder" for organized crime, said Saskia Niño de Rivera, the co-founder of the [Mexican nonprofit Reinserta](#), one of the few organizations trying to create programs for at-risk youths, along with youth offenders in prison and those who have recently been released.

"Youths Constructing the Future is just a job placement project. And the problems of mental health, addictions, poverty, are much more complex than just saying, well, what you need is to work," said Niño de Rivera.

Reinserta [released a study](#) in October comprised of interviews with 89 kids in youth facilities around Mexico, of which 67 said they'd been actively working with drug cartels before their arrest. The average age that they began working with organized crime was between 13 and 15, although the study [included](#) interviews with children who claimed they were carrying out murders and disposing of bodies for drug cartels as young as 10.

"I believe that it is precisely this population that is completely forgotten by the state. There has been such a fear of getting into the issue of adolescents who commit serious crimes," she said.

For Niño de Rivera, the solution is twofold: It involves stopping children from being recruited by organized crime, and helping those who've been released reintegrate into society. That means offering more recreational and learning opportunities for young children in dangerous areas, along with help for kids from families fractured by domestic abuse. Funded by local and international donations, the group also urges the government to create a national registry of children who have been recruited by cartels, and provide special psychological attention to help them reintegrate.

In April, Mexico's top security official, Rosa Icela Rodríguez, made a promising move when she [announced the formation](#) of the National Observatory for the Prevention of the Recruitment of Minors by Organized Crime. Both Niño de Rivera and REDIM's Ramírez are part of the group. But so far the observatory has not instituted any firm plans.

During a Reinserta workshop focused on emotional intelligence and machismo in Mexico City, an instructor quizzed three young men to name examples of "micromachismos." One of them ventured a response. "To be with a friend and see a woman, and laugh and ogle the woman," he said. "That's exactly it," the female instructor replied.

Omar, whose name has been changed, finally felt emotionally ready to re-enter society after two years in Reinserta's reintegration center. For people recently released from prison, it's like finding an oasis in the house in a middle-class Mexico City neighborhood where the nonprofit runs its program.

Youths attend workshops from boxing to radio broadcasting, along with different forms of therapy.

Omar had been involved in organized crime since his early teens but was caught and imprisoned in his 20s. Now 30 years old, he worries his own children, aged 13 and 14, could be recruited too.

"Because of what I learned here, when there's an issue or conflict, I'll try to sit at the table with them. I don't want to imitate what my dad did," Omar said. His father, who had worked in a cartel, physically abused him, his siblings, and his mother.

He's changed his phone number twice since leaving prison to avoid old friends.

“Before I'd heard words about values, but truthfully, I didn't know what they meant,” Omar said. “I'd hear words like ‘empathy’ or ‘patience’, and maybe out of pain or fear, or in order to not feel ignorant, I shut up.”

‘They killed one of my friends’

In the northern Mexican state of Zacatecas, nearly two dozen teenagers crawled along a dusty trail. Laura, 14, grit her teeth as stones dug into her elbows and shins, persevering to cross a pylon marker and finish the drill before she collapsed.

Laura and the other kids, most aged 11-17, were members of a military-inspired after-school group called the *Legionarios*, which was celebrating its one-year anniversary with a camping trip outside Fresnillo, [one of the most dangerous cities](#) in the country. But the weekend was also tinged with grief.

“They killed one of my friends a little while ago. He used to come here too,” Laura, whose name has been changed to protect her identity, said later that mid-August day.

A month earlier, gunmen entered the house of her friend Henry and [shot him dead](#) along with two other boys. The teens were three of 21 people murdered across Zacatecas during [an especially](#) deadly 24-hour period in July. The unsolved murder of three children barely registered because it happens with such chilling frequency.

The ragtag Legionnaires club in Fresnillo is one of the few projects around the country that do that sort of outreach. The kids had all gone out to train together the day that Henry was killed. When Laura found out the next morning, all she felt was complete confusion: “How? I just saw him. He was fine yesterday.”

A 14-year-old boy from Laura’s school recently told her he’d been carrying out hits for the cartel because “his family was very poor.” She hoped to resist the temptations and dangers of crime, maintain her focus at school through the discipline of the Legionnaires program, and perhaps go on to study “childcare, dentistry, or psychology.”

[The Legionnaires](#)—named after the Roman Empire’s infantry—were founded in the summer of 2020 by Daniel Rivera, a former Mexican army soldier. Rivera, 32, is in a wheelchair, paralyzed from the waist down after he was shot in the back during a train robbery. He was working in private security [protecting Mexico's rail system](#) when a train heist took place and a colleague of his working with the thieves shot him in the back.

“That's why I dedicate myself today to instilling respect, loyalty, in young people, so they don't sell themselves out. Because this guy did sell himself; he sold himself for a few pesos,” he said.

“The idea of [[The Legionnaires](#)] project isn't for [the kids] to join the army in the future. It's so that in their future life, they will be leaders, responsible young people, respectful in their jobs, whatever their job,” Rivera said. “To be people in control of their own lives.”

The group of kids has fluctuated over the past year, with some dropping out, unable to handle the strenuous program. At its peak, Rivera said 50 kids would turn up for the regular workouts he runs in the streets of Fresnillo. Fewer than two dozen kids came along on the camping trip, and for many of them, it was their first time ever spending a night under the stars.

His gruff voice boomed commands and encouragement through a bullhorn as the children jogged in an infantry formation at a ranch a couple of miles off one of the highways leaving Fresnillo.

The rural areas surrounding the city are some of the most treacherous in the country, where competing drug cartels operate training areas and safe houses in [a war](#) between the Sinaloa Cartel, CJNG, and remnants of the Zetas Cartel. Other criminal groups also operate in the area.

It was the first time the Legionnaires had gone camping in around half a year because it had taken Rivera months of scouting to find a place where he felt he could keep the children safe for an overnight camping excursion.

Numerous narco-camps [have recently been busted by authorities](#) in the area, and the criminal groups sow horror by [abandoning dead bodies](#) in the arid terrain or [hanging them from nearby bridges](#).

Between drills, the kids sat around their tents where they'd prepared to spend the night. They brought very little: eggs, beans, and tortillas. Rivera had confiscated "contraband" like cellphones and snacks, with the exception of a few marshmallows for the campfire. The campers learned to turn tarps into shelters during intermittent rainstorms, and how to cook over a small fire.

The death of young Henry, the boy from the Legionnaires murdered a month earlier, "was a really difficult blow," Rivera said, adding that Fresnillo over the past three years had become filled with fear. The criminals "don't mind taking innocents away, young children, mothers. They just took one of my guys."

Henry wasn't the first. Two other boys who dropped out of the program were also killed in the past year. Rivera just hopes to get the other kids out of their teenage years alive.

A few lawmakers have tried to tackle the dangers children face in Zacatecas. In September 2019, Mónica Borrego, a Zacatecas City teacher turned local deputy, led a group of state legislators to [propose a children's rights initiative](#).

To support the bill, she presented a study of over 500 children around the state that showed that 80 percent of children surveyed had suffered some type of violence. Another 30 percent agreed that their schools had been infiltrated by gangs, while 29 percent said they'd taken a weapon to school.

Her bill was never truly considered, Borrego said, despite all the evidence she presented.

The solutions are not simple, she said, because the main concern is raising children's self-esteem, when they "feel like they don't fit into society." Instead, she said, they need to be told "that they can enter and be valuable within a healthy society."

"That is not done with a spot on the radio but with effective programs of social workers, rehabilitation clinics, and recruitment programs for young people as well," she said. "Just like [the cartels] are recruiting them to be the sicarios."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	12/08 Homicide records broken in 12 major cities
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/12-major-us-cities-top-annual-homicide-records/story?id=81466453
GIST	<p>At least 12 major U.S. cities have broken annual homicide records in 2021 -- and there's still three weeks to go in the year.</p> <p>Of the dozen cities that have already surpassed the grim milestones for killings, five topped records that were set or tied just last year.</p> <p>"It's terrible to every morning get up and have to go look at the numbers and then look at the news and see the stories. It's just crazy. It's just crazy and this needs to stop," Philadelphia Mayor Jim Kenney said after his city surpassed its annual homicide record of 500, which stood since 1990.</p> <p>Philadelphia, a city of roughly 1.5 million people, has had more homicides this year (521 as of Dec. 6) than the nation's two largest cities, New York (443 as of Dec. 5) and Los Angeles (352 as of Nov. 27). That's an increase of 13% from 2020, a year that nearly broke the 1990 record.</p>

Chicago, the nation's third-largest city, leads the nation with 739 homicides as of the end of November, up 3% from 2020, according to Chicago Police Department crime data. Chicago's deadliest year remains 1970 when there were 974 homicides.

Philadelphia's homicide record was broken in the same week that Columbus, Indianapolis and Louisville eclipsed records for slayings.

Experts say there are a number of reasons possibly connected to the jump in homicides, including strained law enforcement staffing, a pronounced decline in arrests and continuing hardships from the pandemic, but that there is no clear answer across the board.

5 cities surpass records set in 2020

Other major cities that have surpassed yearly homicide records are St. Paul, Minnesota; Portland, Oregon; Tucson, Arizona; Toledo, Ohio; Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Austin, Texas; Rochester, New York; and Albuquerque, New Mexico, which broke its record back in August.

"The community has to get fed up," Capt. Frank Umbrino, of the Rochester Police Department, said at a news conference after the city of just over 200,000 people broke its 30-year-old record on Nov. 11. "We're extremely frustrated. It has to stop. I mean, it's worse than a war zone around here lately."

Indianapolis, Columbus, Louisville, Toledo and Baton Rouge broke records set in 2020, while St. Paul surpassed a record set in 1992.

Among the major cities on the brink of setting new homicide records are Milwaukee, which has 178 homicides, 12 short of a record set in 2020; and Minneapolis, which has 91 homicides, six shy of a record set in 1995.

According to the FBI's annual Uniform Crime Report released in September, the nation saw a 30% increase in murder in 2020, the largest single-year jump since the bureau began recording crime statistics 60 years ago.

'Nobody's getting arrested'

Robert Boyce, retired chief of detectives for the New York Police Department and an ABC News contributor, said that while there is no single reason for the jump in slayings, one national crime statistic stands out to him.

"Nobody's getting arrested anymore," Boyce said. "People are getting picked up for gun possession and they're just let out over and over again."

The FBI crime data shows that the number of arrests nationwide plummeted 24% in 2020, from the more than 10 million arrests made in 2019. The number of 2020 arrests -- 7.63 million -- is the lowest in 25 years, according to the data. FBI crime data is not yet available for 2021.

Christopher Herrmann, an assistant professor in the Department of Law & Police Science at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York City, said the decrease in arrests could be attributed to the large number of police officers who retired or resigned in 2020 and 2021.

A workforce survey released in June by the [Police Executive Research Forum](#) found the retirement rate in police departments nationwide jumped 45% over 2020 and 2021. And another 18% of officers resigned, the survey found, a development which coincided with nationwide social justice protests and calls to defund law enforcement agencies following the death of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police officers.

On average, the survey found that law enforcement agencies are currently filling only 93% of the authorized number of positions available and Herrmann said many departments have been hampered in hiring because of an inability to get large classes into police academies due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"I think, unfortunately, police departments are just losing a lot of their best and experienced officers and then because of the economic crisis, because of COVID, are having difficulties in hiring or just delays in hirings," Herrmann said.

Herrmann said he suspects that a confluence of other factors has also contributed to the spike in lethal violence over the last two years. He said the COVID-19 pandemic not only prompted a shutdown of courts and reduction in jail population to slow the spread of the virus but also derailed after-school programs and violence disruption programs.

Confluence of factors

"I wish there was one good solid reason that I could give you for the increases, but the reality is there is none," Herrmann, a former crime analyst supervisor for the New York City Police Department, told ABC News.

Herrmann said he was surprised to see the number of homicides going up in major cities across the United States after an overall 30% jump last year.

"I knew 2020 was going to be a bad year because of the (COVID-19) pandemic but I really thought that a lot of these numbers would come down in 2021 just because a lot of society reopened and reopened pretty quickly," Herrmann said. "We don't have the unemployment problem, we don't have a lot of the economic stresses, housing and food insecurities aren't as much of an issue. A lot of those things were leading to the mental health stressors that were plaguing the country."

As part of a recent ABC News series ["Rethinking Gun Violence,"](#) Dr. Daniel Webster, the director of the Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Policy and Research, said 2020 was the "perfect storm" of conditions where "everything bad happened at the same time -- you had the COVID outbreak, huge economic disruption, people were scared."

Webster added, "It's particularly challenging to know with certainty which of these things independently is associated with the increased violence. Rather it was the 'cascade' of events all unfolding in a similar time frame."

Chief LeRonne Armstrong of the Oakland, California, Police Department told ABC News recently that the lack of resources to fight crime is one of the reasons he suspects is why his city is seeing the highest number of homicides in decades. Oakland police have investigated at least 127 homicides in 2021, up from 102 in all of 2020. The Bay Area city's all-time high for homicides is 175 set in 1992.

Armstrong said his department's 676 officers is the smallest staff his agency has had in years, nearly 70 fewer officers than in 2020.

"To have 70, nearly 70 less officers a year later," Armstrong said, "is definitely going to have an impact on our ability to address public safety."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	12/09 Denmark: arrests; leaking classified info
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/danes-arrest-people-leaking-classified-intelligence-81646230
GIST	<p>COPENHAGEN, Denmark -- The Danish security service said Thursday that it has arrested four people with Denmark's two intelligence agencies on suspicion of "disclosing highly classified information from the intelligence services."</p> <p>In a brief statement, the domestic Danish Security and Intelligence Service, known by its Danish acronym PET, said the four are current and former employees of the two services.</p> <p>Denmark's other intelligence agency is the Danish Defense Intelligence Service, known by the acronym FE.</p>

	<p>The arrests were made Wednesday together with the police and searches were made at a number of different addresses, the domestic security agency said. It added that the arrests “are the result of a lengthy investigation into leaks from the intelligence services. The investigation is still ongoing.”</p> <p>PET declined to elaborate further.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	12/08 Columbus OH: triple shooting; 2 kids dead
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/children-ages-killed-triple-shooting-ohio-apartment-complex/story?id=81623353
GIST	<p>As a mother sobbed and wailed in the background for her slain children, a Columbus, Ohio, police official announced that a 9-year-old boy and a 6-year-old girl were among three people found fatally shot in a vehicle.</p> <p>In an emotional news conference Tuesday night following the deadly ambush outside an apartment complex, Assistant Chief LaShanna Potts of the Columbus Police Department directed a message to the "monsters" responsible for the killings, saying, "We will hunt you down until we get you."</p> <p>"What we do know right now is that we have two young kids who have been murdered," Potts said. "There's a mother now who will have to go on in her life without two young babies that she will no longer get to raise. They don't get to get married. They don't get to go to school."</p> <p>The killings came as Ohio's capital city is in the midst of an unprecedented surge in homicide. Columbus is one of at least 12 major U.S. cities that have broken annual homicide records with a little over three weeks to go in the year.</p> <p>Columbus surpassed its record set just last year by recording its 175th homicide of 2021 on Nov. 26.</p> <p>Potts said Tuesday's triple slaying occurred about 6:16 p.m. local time in the parking lot of the Winchester Lakes apartment complex on the city's southeast side.</p> <p>She said officers responded to reports of shots fired and found a bullet-riddled vehicle in a parking spot with three bodies inside.</p> <p>In a statement released Wednesday morning, police officials identified the victims as 6-year-old Londynn Wall'neal, 9-year-old Demetrius Wall'neal and 22-year-old Charles Wade.</p> <p>At least two gunmen walked up to the vehicle and "without any warning or provocation" opened fire, according to the statement. Following the shooting, the gunmen got into a waiting car driven by a third suspect and fled the scene, the statement reads.</p> <p>"This is unacceptable," Potts said. "I am pissed. I speak for the division and the officers who have to go on these runs day in and day out. It's getting tiresome. This should be an outrage to this community and we have to say enough is enough."</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	12/08 Students copycat threats to attack schools
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/multiple-students-charged-string-copycat-threats-oxford-high/story?id=81623370
GIST	<p>Several students in Michigan, including some in middle school, have been hit with criminal charges alleging they posted online threats to stage copycat attacks like the one eight days ago at Oxford High School in suburban Detroit that left four teenagers dead, authorities said.</p> <p>"They are saying, 'I'm going to bomb the school. I'm going to kill people,'" Washtenaw County Prosecutor Eli Savit told ABC affiliate station WXYZ in Detroit.</p>

Of the students charged, one faces a count of possession of a weapon in a school, authorities said.

Savit said most of the students thought they were making anonymous threats online.

"Even if you believe you make it through an anonymous social media account, law enforcement has ways to track you down and find you and when that happens, you're going to get charged," Savit said.

Savit said his office has charged two students with making threats, both middle school students.

The Harper Woods Police Department in Wayne County announced the arrests of two students for making threats.

Waterford police in Oakland County told WXYZ they arrested an eighth-grader from Mason Middle School in Waterford after he posted a firearm on social media with the caption, "Bro mason your next I'm coming for you on Tuesday."

Prosecutors in Macomb County said five students are also facing charges of making threats against schools and another five students are facing similar charges in Macomb County, according to WXYZ.

Meanwhile, Texas police are also investigating a high school student who allegedly made an online threat against his Houston area school.

The Klein Intermediate School District Police Department said it is working with the Harris County district attorney to bring criminal charges against the student.

David Kimberly, the school district's police chief, said during a news conference on Wednesday that officials at Klein Cain High School received a string of threats of violence against the campus via social media on Monday and Tuesday.

In a letter to parents, Kimberly said his officers worked with the FBI to track down the student, who has since been expelled from the school.

The copycat threats follow the deadly Nov. 30 attack at Oxford High School that also left eight people wounded.

Ethan Crumbley, 15, a student at Oxford High School, was charged as an adult with two dozen crimes, including murder, attempted murder and terrorism, for the shooting rampage at the Oakland County school. Crumbley's parents, James and Jennifer Crumbley, who allegedly provided their son with the gun used in the school shooting, were also arrested and charged with four counts of involuntary manslaughter and remain in jail on \$500,000 bail each.

Ethan Crumbly and his parents have pleaded not guilty to the charges.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	12/08 Father, son arrested: Calif. Caldor wildfire
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/father-son-arrested-wildfire-threatened-lake-tahoe-81639045
GIST	<p>SACRAMENTO, Calif. -- A father and son were arrested Wednesday on suspicion of starting a massive California wildfire that destroyed many homes and forced tens of thousands of people to flee Lake Tahoe communities earlier this year, authorities said.</p> <p>David Scott Smith, 66, and his son, Travis Shane Smith, 32, are accused of reckless arson in a warrant issued before formal charges are filed, the El Dorado County District Attorney's office said.</p> <p>Mark Reichel, the attorney for both men, said they were arrested Wednesday afternoon and that reckless arson means starting a blaze by accident but "to such a degree that it was considered reckless."</p>

	<p>Authorities allege they caused homes to burn and people to be seriously injured in the fire that began in August. The Caldor fire scorched more than 346 square miles (897 square kilometers) from east of Sacramento to the Nevada border, threatening ski resorts and other prominent recreational areas.</p> <p>The fire destroyed more than 1,000 homes and other buildings while crossing a mostly remote forested area of seasonal cabins.</p> <p>The fire crossed through three northern counties, destroyed much of the small community of Grizzly Flats and forced tens of thousands of people to evacuate the resort town of South Lake Tahoe before it was contained in October. Five people were injured.</p> <p>It was one of two massive fires last summer that for the first time in modern history crossed the Sierra Nevada range.</p> <p>El Dorado County District Attorney Vern Pierson provided few details about the arrest of the Smiths, citing the investigation.</p> <p>Reichel, the men's lawyer, said: "They are absolutely 100% innocent."</p> <p>Reichel said he did not know details of the accusation, such as how authorities allege the fire was set.</p> <p>He said Travis Smith is an electrician and was with his father near where the fire started. The son called 911 to report seeing flames, Reichel said.</p> <p>The son made several 911 calls because the calls kept dropping in the rugged area, and both men also warned campers about the fire, Reichel said.</p> <p>"Neither one has ever been in trouble with the law in their life. They're very law-abiding people," he said.</p> <p>The pair have a scheduled court appearance on Friday, Reichel said.</p> <p>"There has been no evidence submitted into a court subject to my cross-examination ... that proves any of the prosecution's evidence yet. So I urge everyone to wait and hear what really happened before they form any opinions," Reichel added.</p> <p>The district attorney's office said the case was developed with the U.S. Forest Service, California's firefighting agency and the California Department of Justice, with help from the Sacramento County District Attorney's crime lab.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	12/08 Michigan man charged: assault, Capitol riot
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/wireStory/michigan-man-charged-assault-officers-capitol-riot-81637142
GIST	<p>ROMEO, Mich. -- A 41-year-old Michigan man appeared in court Wednesday on allegations that he used chemical spray on law enforcement officers as part of a mob that stormed the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6.</p> <p>Tim Boughner is charged with engaging in physical violence in a restricted building or grounds, civil disorder, and assaulting, resisting, or impeding certain officers with a dangerous weapon, the U.S. attorney's office for the District of Columbia said in a release.</p> <p>Boughner, of Romeo, north of Detroit, appeared in federal court in Detroit and was ordered jailed pending a detention hearing Thursday.</p> <p>Video shows him in a crowd of rioters at the Capitol and using a chemical spray against officers attempting to secure the building, the government said.</p>

	<p>The government added that in a Feb. 17 social media poste, Boughner stated: “I have to share. My life has not been the same since this day ... I still don’t know how I ended up on the capital steps having a pepper spray fight with the capital police.”</p> <p>The rioters were attempting to interrupt the Electoral College vote count of the 2020 presidential election in which Joe Biden defeated Donald Trump.</p> <p>More than 700 people have been arrested in nearly all 50 states for crimes related to the Capitol breach, including more than 220 people charged with assaulting or impeding law enforcement, the government said.</p>
Return to Top	

Information From Online Communities and Unclassified Sources/InFOCUS is a situational awareness report published daily by the Washington State Fusion Center.

If you no longer wish to receive this report, please submit an email to intake@wsfc.wa.gov and enter UNSUBSCRIBE InFOCUS in the Subject line.

DISCLAIMER - the articles highlighted within InFOCUS is for informational purposes only and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Washington State Fusion Center, the City of Seattle, the Seattle Police Department or the Washington State Patrol and have been included only for ease of reference and academic purposes.

FAIR USE Notice All rights to these copyrighted items are reserved. Articles and graphics have been placed within for educational and discussion purposes only, in compliance with 'Fair Use' criteria established in Section 107 of the Copyright Act of 1976. The principle of 'Fair Use' was established as law by Section 107 of The Copyright Act of 1976. 'Fair Use' legally eliminates the need to obtain permission or pay royalties for the use of previously copyrighted materials if the purposes of display include 'criticism, comment, news reporting, teaching, scholarship, and research.' Section 107 establishes four criteria for determining whether the use of a work in any particular case qualifies as a 'fair use'. A work used does not necessarily have to satisfy all four criteria to qualify as an instance of 'fair use'. Rather, 'fair use' is determined by the overall extent to which the cited work does or does not substantially satisfy the criteria in their totality. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes of your own that go beyond 'fair use,' you must obtain permission from the copyright owner. For more information go to: [≤http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/17/107.shtml>](http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/17/107.shtml)

THIS DOCUMENT MAY CONTAIN COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL. COPYING AND DISSEMINATION IS PROHIBITED WITHOUT PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNERS.

Source: <http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/17/107.shtml>

[Return to Top](#)